This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

http://books.google.com



AH 3U78 W

Harvard Depository
Brittle Book



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE MIRROR OF PERFECTION

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

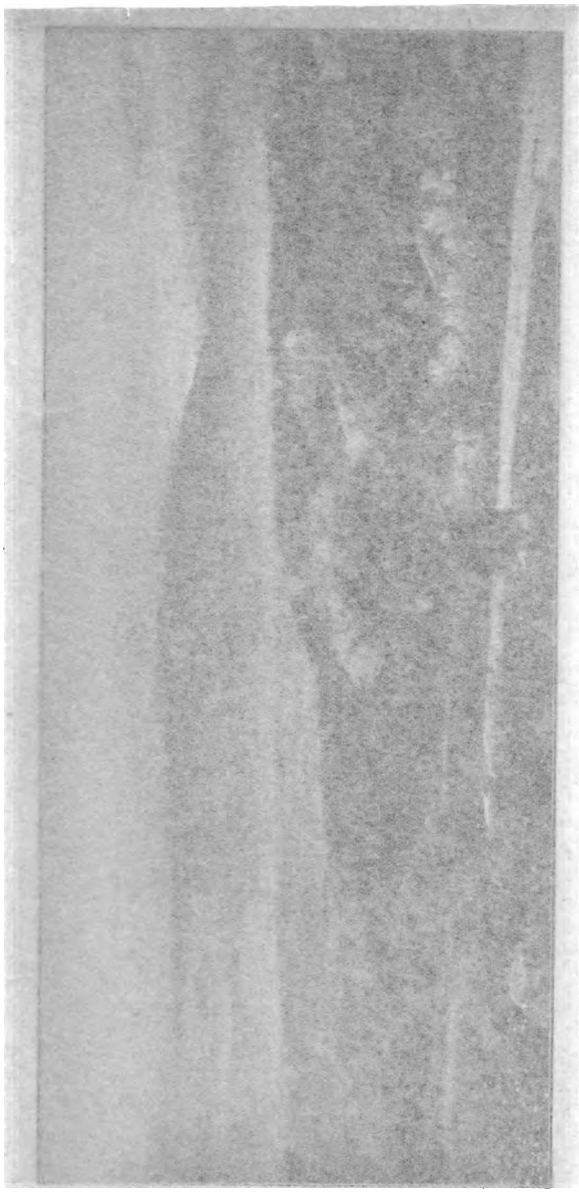


"BROTHER FRANCIS AND BROTHER SUN:"
ST. FRANCIS GREETING THE SUNRISE ON THE PLAINS OF UMBRIA.

FROM THE PAINTING BY SIGNOR COSTA IN THE COLLECTION OF THE EARL OF CARLISLE AT CASTLE HOWARD.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

THE

MIRROR OF PERFECTION

BEING A RECORD OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

ASCRIBED TO HIS COMPANION

BROTHER LEO OF ASSISI

AND NOW TRANSLATED BY

CONSTANCE, COUNTESS DE LA WARR

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

FATHER CUTHBERT, O.S.F.C.

LONDON: BURNS & OATES, LIMITED
NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO: BENZIGER BROTHERS
1902

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

604.7
F65.9
L576se
1902

PREFACE

Now that the ancient "legends" of St. Francis are being brought to light, we can once more behold the Saint as he appeared to the eyes of those who knew him best; and it is becoming more and more evident that the finally acceptable "Life of St. Francis" has yet to be written, since none of the modern biographies have given him to us as he is revealed by his contemporaries. Meanwhile, therefore, he who would understand the real St. Francis must go direct to the "legends" themselves. But the "legends" are all more or less fragmentary; each tells us of certain incidents in the Saint's life, and not of others. Hence no single "legend" gives us a complete picture of the Saint. Again, almost all of them were written with something of a polemical purpose. For very early in the history of the Order there

Digitized by Google

arose controversies as to the intentions of St. Francis concerning the life his brethren were to lead, and the "legends" were written generally as a contribution to the controversy, and were necessarily somewhat coloured by the writer's personal views on the subjects under discussion. Most free of all from the spirit of controversy is perhaps the "legend" of the Three Companions; most highly coloured by it is "The Mirror of Perfection."

The writer of this book has evidently undertaken to set forth what he considers to be the actual intention of St. Francis regarding the observance of Poverty, in opposition to those whom he considered traitors to the Saint and his ideal. His book bears the impress of a soul highly indignant with the false brethren who were betraying the Lady Poverty. Evidently at the time when the work was written there was hot controversy in the Order, between the Relaxed Brethren and the Spiritual or Observant Brethren, and the writer is the spokesman of these latter.

Who, then, was the writer? The title-page says it was Brother Leo, and M.

Digitized by Google

Sabatier unhesitatingly ascribes the work to him, and claims that it was written in the year 1228, two years after St. Francis' death. But the majority of critics hold that it is of a later date, probably about the beginning of the fourteenth century; and that in great part it is a compilation from earlier documents. Certainly the book bears the impress of various hands; for whilst some of the chapters in the original Latin are remarkably limpid in style and vivid in description, other chapters are involved in style, and quite wanting in descriptive quality. Nevertheless, the book bears in parts the genuine impress of the earliest Franciscan spirit, with its zeal for Poverty and with its simplicity. And these chapters might be aptly described as the story of St. Francis' Passion, written by one who entirely entered in spirit into the bitter disappointment experienced by the Saint during the last three or four years of his life, when he saw so many of the friars following Brother Elias and his compeers in the ways of ambition and worldliness, in disregard of the original simplicity of the Franciscan vocation. It is sad reading;

Digitized by Google

and yet very wholesome; for it reminds us how the flesh is ever rebellious against the spirit, and apt to mar the most spiritual movements; and how the worldly spirit is ever in conflict with the Spirit of God, wherever the Spirit of God is found. There are those who are scandalised when they discover imperfection in a religious body of men. But healthy minds see only the inevitable conflict which must arise when a spiritual ideal comes into close contact with the earth; and they are edified even if humbled.

FATHER CUTHBERT, O.S.F.C.

Digitized by Google

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

No apology is needed for presenting an English version of "The Mirror of Perfection" to the public: the book is all too little known, and its merits are great. I am not unmindful of the fact that another translation exists, but in that work the mediæval Latin is reproduced in mediæval English more suited to the scholar than to the general reader. Plenty of room remains, therefore, for an edition which seeks to give a faithful rendering couched in modern forms.

The writer of the original text tells his story simply and directly in Latin which, if far from classical, is at all events easily understood. His vocabulary is very limited, and he repeats the same expressions many times over. No attempt has been made to remedy this or any other defects of a style which has the merit of being singularly convincing despite, or perhaps because of, its

Digitized by Google

homespun roughness and want of adornment. A few technical terms which are still in use to this day in the Franciscan Order have been retained, and as these are not generally known it may be as well to say here that by "Prelates" of the Order are understood those Superiors who have more or less power to dispense from certain Rules. These are the "Ministers" and "Guardians." The Ministers consist of the head of the Order, who is the Minister-General, and the heads of Provinces under the Minister-General, who are the Ministers-Provincial. The Guardians are the heads of single monasteries under the Provincials. When the term "the Religion" occurs, it is synonymous with "the Order," hence the members of a Religion or Order throughout the Catholic Church are always known as "Religious."

CONSTANCE DE LA WARR.

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

HERE BEGINS THE MIRROR OF PERFECTION

PAGE

What answer Blessed Francis made to the Ministers who did not desire to be bound by the Rule he had made . . 1-3

CHAPTER II

ON THE PERFECTION OF POVERTY

How Blessed Francis declared his will and intention he had from first to last on the observance of Holy Poverty—How he replied to a Minister who wished to have books, and how the Ministers took a chapter out of the Rule—Of the Novice who wished to have a Psalter—Of the Poverty to be observed in books, buildings, and furnishings—How he made the friars leave a certain house—How he wished to pull down a house built at St. Mary of the Portiuncula—How he reprimanded his Vicar—Of the special cell made for him, and the one he would not live in—How places were to be selected, and friaries built in cities—Of the Prelates and learned friars who opposed him—How he would not have superfluous alms—What Christ told him of the Poverty of the Order—His horror of money—Avoidance of soft and many garments, and practice of patience—How he would not indulge himself in things other friars could not have—His shame when he saw one poorer than himself—How he taught the friars to ask alms—How he would not have the friars solicitous for the morrow—Of the sumptuous repast on Christmas Day—How the Lord Bishop

Digitized by Google

PAGE

of Ostia wept—How the soldiers were compelled to beg for alms—How he collected alms before he came to the Cardinal's table—The friar who would not pray nor work, but would eat—Of the poor man who joyfully collected alms—How it was revealed to him the Brethren were to be called Friars-Minor 4–38

CHAPTER III

OF CHARITY AND COMPASSION AND LOVING-KINDNESS TO OUR NEIGHBOUR

How Blessed Francis comforted a friar who was dying of hunger—How he ate grapes with a sick friar—How he clothed a poor woman—How he gave to those needier than himself—How he gave his new mantle to a poor man—How he persuaded a poor man to forgive his Lord—How he gave his mantle to a poor sick woman—How he gave his tunic to some friars of France—How he tried to give away a piece of cloth—How he induced Brother Giles to clothe a poor man—Of the penance he gave a friar for rash judgment—Of the New Testament he had given to the mother of two friars . . . 39–52

CHAPTER IV

OF THE PERFECTION OF HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE

How Blessed Francis resigned the office of Minister-General—How he gave up his companions—How he resigned because of bad Prelates—How he begged meat for the sick—Of the humble answers made by himself and Blessed Dominic to the Cardinal—How he wished the friars to tend the lepers—How he ever gave honour to God alone—How he desired a Guardian to be placed over him—How he taught the perfect way of obedience—How

Digitized by Google

PAGE

he spoke of obedience under the figure of a corpse—Of discretion in imposing obedience, and readiness in obeying —How he would have no privilege in preaching for the Order—How the friars were reconciled to each other—How Christ complained to Brother Leo of the friars—Of the answer he made to the Doctor of the Order of Preachers—Of humility and concord with the clergy—How he obtained the Church of St. Mary of the Angels —How he swept and cleaned churches—Of the peasant who became a saintly friar—How he ate from a bowl with a leper—How he put the demons to flight—The vision of Brother Pacificus—How he caused himself to be dragged before the people—How he spoke of any comforts he gave himself—How he accused himself of vainglory—The state of perfect humility in himself—How he desired to preach in distant lands—Blessed Francis, the friars, and the robbers—How he was beaten by demons in the Cardinal's house—How he reproved the friars and foretold the reformation of the Order—How he divined that vain learning would ruin the Order—How the friars who entered the Order in the time of tribulation would be better than their predecessors—Why he did not himself correct the defects in the Order—Letter to Brother Conrad from Brother Leo—How the prayers and tears of humble friars convert souls —How he desired Prelates and preachers to exercise works of humility—How he told the friars when he was the servant of God and when not—How he desired the friars should at times labour with their hands . . 53–110

CHAPTER V

OF HIS ZEAL FOR THE PERFECT OBSERVANCE OF THE RULE AND FOR ALL THE ORDER

How Blessed Francis wished the friars to observe the Rule in life and death—Of the martyred Lay Brother and the Rule—The four privileges revealed to him—Of the

Digitized by Google

PAGE

Minister-General and his companions—What the Lord said to him in his affliction—Of his singular love and zeal for St. Mary of the Portiuncula—How he admonished the friars never to desert it—The prerogatives of St. Mary of the Angels 111–124

CHAPTER VI

HIS ZEAL FOR THE PERFECTION OF THE FRIARS

How Blessed Francis described the perfect friar—How he described unchaste eyes—The three sentences he left to the friars—Of the bread he gave the friars on his death-bed—How he feared to trouble the friars in his illness—How he admonished the Sisters of St. Clare . . 125–133

CHAPTER VII

OF HIS LOVE AND COMPASSION FOR THE PASSION OF CHRIST

How Blessed Francis forgot his pains in the Passion of Christ—How he lamented over the Passion of Christ—How his joy was turned into tears of compassion for Christ 134–136

CHAPTER VIII

OF HIS ZEAL FOR PRAYER AND DIVINE SERVICE, AND JOY IN HIMSELF AND OTHERS

Of prayer and the Divine Office—How Blessed Francis in himself and others loved spiritual joy—How he reproved his companion for showing sadness—How he taught the friars not to neglect their bodies 137–14

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

OF CERTAIN TEMPTATIONS THAT TRIED BLESSED FRANCIS

PAGE

How the Devil entered his pillow—Of a temptation he had more than two years—Of the temptations he had through mice 143–148

CHAPTER X

OF THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

How Blessed Francis made peace between the Bishop and the Governor of Assisi—Of the fall of the friar who would confess only by signs—Of one who wept before Blessed Francis and was rejected—Of the priest's vineyard and the wondrous vintage—Of the Knights of Perugia who disturbed his sermon—How he detected a hidden temptation—His blessing and prediction of Brother Bernard—Of the message he sent to Blessed Clare—How he predicted the honour paid to his body . . 149–163

CHAPTER XI

OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE THAT SUCCOURED HIM IN EXTERIOR THINGS

How the Lord provided for the table of the friars—Of the fish Blessed Francis longed for—Of the food he desired, and the cloth for his burial 164–168

CHAPTER XII

OF HIS LOVE FOR CREATURES, AND THE LOVE OF CREATURES FOR HIM

Of the love Blessed Francis had for the hooded larks—Of the special law he wished the Emperor to make—How the

Digitized by Google

PAGE

fire obeyed him—How he would not let them put out a fire—How he would not use a fur he had saved from the fire—Of his love for water, stones, trees, and flowers—The Canticle of Brother Sun 169–178

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE DEATH OF BLESSED FRANCIS, AND THE JOY HE SHOWED AT THE APPROACH OF DEATH

The answer Blessed Francis made to Brother Elias—How he questioned the physician—How he welcomed Sister Death—How he blessed Assisi when he was carried to St. Mary's, where he died 179–185

Digitized by Google

THE
MIRROR OF PERFECTION

CHAPTER I

HERE BEGINS THE MIRROR OF PERFECTION OF THE FRIAR-MINOR, ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI.

What answer Blessed Francis made to the Ministers who did not desire to be bound by the Rule he had made.

BLESSED FRANCIS made three Rules, one approved by Pope Innocent without a Bull, another shorter one which was lost, then the one confirmed by Pope Honorius with a Bull, from which many things were taken out against the wish of Blessed Francis. After the second Rule made by Blessed Francis was lost, he retired to a certain mountain, taking with him Brother Leo of Assisi and Brother Bonizio of Bologna, that he might make another Rule, which he had written as he was taught by Christ. Whereupon many of the ministers came to

Digitized by Google

Brother Elias, who was Vicar to Blessed Francis, saying: "We hear that this Brother Francis is making a new Rule, and we greatly fear that he is making it so severe that it will be impossible for us to follow it. We therefore beg you to go to him and say we do not wish to be bound by such a Rule, and that if he makes it, it will be for himself and not for us." To this Brother Elias answered he would not go without them, wherefore they all went together. And Brother Elias having come nigh to where Blessed Francis was, called him, and Francis answered him, and seeing the said ministers, asked him, "What do all these friars want?" Brother Elias replied: "These are ministers who, having heard you are making a new Rule, and fearing you will make it too severe, say and protest they will not be bound by it, but if you make it, let it be for yourself and not for them." Then Blessed Francis lifted his eyes to heaven and spoke thus to Christ, "Lord, did I not tell Thee they would not believe me?" At once all heard the Voice of Christ in the air, making answer, "Francis, nothing in this Rule is of thine, but all is from Me, and it is My Will the Rule should be observed to the letter, to the letter, without comment, without comment, without comment." And He added, "I know how great is human weakness; let those who will not observe the Rule leave the Order."

Digitized by Google

Then Blessed Francis, turning to these friars, said to them, "Ye have heard, ye have heard! Do you wish to hear it again?" The ministers, finding themselves thus reproved, left, filled with confusion and fear.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

ON THE PERFECTION OF POVERTY.

First how Blessed Francis declared his will and intention, which he had from the beginning until the end, on the observance of Poverty.

BROTHER RICHER of the March, noble by lineage and noble by holiness, whom Blessed Francis loved with a great love, went one day to visit him at the Palace of the Bishop of Assisi, and, amongst other things, speaking to him of the state of the Religion, asked him specially this: "Tell me, Father, what was your intention when you first had friars, and the intention you have now, and believe you will have till the day of your death, that I may fully know and bear witness to your wishes and intention from the first to the last, whether we cleric-friars who possess many books can keep them, as long as it can be said they are those of the Religion?" Blessed Francis said to him: "I tell you, Brother, it is, and has been, and will be to the end, if the friars will believe me, that no friar should possess anything but his Habit and the cord to gird it, and drawers, according to our Rule."

Digitized by Google

Now if any friar should say, if Blessed Francis desired to make the observance of the Rule and Poverty so rigorous, why did he not make it and cause it to be observed in his own time, we, who were with him, reply in the words ourselves heard from his own mouth, that he said these and other things to the friars, and had many things put down in the Rule which, after long prayer and meditation, he knew to be for the good of the Order according to the Will of God. Nevertheless, when he showed them to the friars, they deemed them hard and insupportable, not knowing what might happen to the Order after his departure from this life. And, as he had a great fear of giving scandal, both in himself and the friars, he would not contend with them in words, unwillingly condescending to their wishes, and excusing himself for this before God. But in order that the word, which the Lord had given him to speak for the welfare of the friars, should not be returned to Him empty, he studied how best to fulfil it in himself, and in this way his soul found peace and consolation.

In what manner he replied to a Minister who wished to have books with his consent, and how, unknown to him, the Ministers took out of the Rule the Chapter of the Gospel prohibition.

One day, when Blessed Francis had returned from the parts beyond sea, a certain minister

Digitized by Google

spoke to him about the Chapter on Poverty, desiring to know what he wished and understood by it, especially of the words contained in the Rule with regard to the Gospel prohibition, "Take nothing with you," &c. Blessed Francis answered him: "I understand by this that the friars should possess nothing except their habit, with the cord, and drawers, according to the Rule, and shoes when it is needful they should wear them." The minister upon this asked him, "What, then, am I to do who possess books worth more than fifty pounds in money?" This he said wishing to have his consent to keep his books with a clear conscience, knowing well how strictly Blessed Francis understood the Chapter on Poverty, and Blessed Francis replied, "I neither wish nor dare to, nor can I, act against my conscience and against the perfection of the Holy Gospel which I profess." When the minister heard this he grew sad. Blessed Francis, seeing his disturbance, with great fervour of spirit said to him, in the person of all the friars, "You wish to have the reputation with men of being Friars-Minor, and followers of the Holy Gospel, while at the same time you desire to profit by the purse."

Now, although the ministers knew that, according to the Rule, the friars were bound to observe the Holy Gospel, they nevertheless cut out of the Rule the words, "Take nothing with

Digitized by Google

you," &c., thinking that by so doing they would not be obliged to the Evangelical observance. When by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost Blessed Francis became aware of this, he said before several of the friars: "The Friars-Ministers think to deceive the Lord and me, although they know that all the friars are bound to observe the perfection of the Holy Gospel. It is my will that first and last it shall be written in the holy Rule that the friars shall steadfastly hold to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and observe it; and that the friars may have no excuse, I have announced, and do now announce to them, that which was put into my mouth by the Lord for their and my salvation; and I desire they shall practise these things before God, and with His aid observe them perpetually." He himself kept the whole of the Holy Gospel to the letter, from the day he first had friars to the day of his death.

Of the Novice who wished to have his permission to keep the Psalter.

Another day there came to him a Friar-Novice who, although he could not read the Psalms well, had obtained permission from the Minister-General to have a Psalter, but, hearing that Blessed Francis did not wish his friars to hanker after learning and books, was not content to

Digitized by Google

keep the Psalter without the license of Blessed Francis.

When Blessed Francis came to the place where the novice was, the latter said to him, "Father, it would give me great consolation to possess the Psalter, but although the General has given me permission, I would rather, Father, also have your consent." To which Blessed Francis replied, "Charles, the emperor, Roland, Oliver, and all the Paladins and valiant men who powerful in battle overcame the infidels with great exertion and labour even unto death, gained honour in these victories, and finally, these holy martyrs fell fighting for the Faith of Christ. In our days, on the contrary, there are many who by only relating their deeds gain the honour and applause of the world. In the same way there are amongst us many who, solely by relating and preaching the actions of the Saints, strive to obtain praise and honour." As if he would say, it is not necessary to be solicitous about books and learning, but about good works, for "much learning puffeth up, but charity edifieth." Not many days after, when Blessed Francis was sitting by the fire, the same novice began again to speak of the Psalter. Blessed Francis answered him thus: "If you had the Psalter, you would want to have the Breviary, and when you had the Breviary, you would seat yourself in an arm-chair like a great Prelate, and

Digitized by Google

say to your brethren, 'Bring me the Breviary.'" Having spoken thus, Blessed Francis, in great fervour of spirit, took ashes, and placing them on his head, and using the gesture of one washing his head, said: "I the Breviary! I the Breviary!" And this he repeated several times, keeping his hand on his head, at which this friar was filled with surprise and mortification. Then Blessed Francis said to him: "Brother, I, also, was tempted in like manner to possess books, until, not knowing the will of God in this matter, I took the Book of the Gospel, praying to God that on my first opening it He would show me His will therein, and when my prayer was ended, I opened the Book at these words, 'To you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but to others in parables.'" And then he added, "There are so many men who strive to acquire learning, that blessed are they who keep themselves ignorant for the love of God."

After many months Blessed Francis was again at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, in the cell beyond the house in the street, when the same friar spoke to him once more about the Psalter. Blessed Francis replied, "Go and do as your minister tells you." Having heard this the friar turned to the way by which he had come. But Blessed Francis remained in the road thinking of the words he had said to this friar, and sud-

Digitized by Google

denly called to him, "Wait for me, Brother, wait for me!" Then going up to him he said, "Return with me, Brother, and show me the place where I said to you do in the matter of the Psalter as your minister tells you." When they had come to the place Blessed Francis fell on his knees before the friar, saying, "I have sinned, I have sinned; for he who would be a Friar-Minor must possess nothing except his habit, as the Rule ordains, with the cord and drawers, and, when it is a manifest necessity, he can have shoes."

Thus whenever the friars came to him for his advice in these matters did he answer them. And he was wont to say, "The measure of a man's knowledge is according to his works, and that Religious is the best preacher whose works are the best, for the worker is known by his fruit."

Of the Poverty to be observed in books, beds, buildings and furnishings.

Blessed Francis taught the friars to seek in books the will of God not costliness, examples of edification not their external beauty, desiring they should have few, and those in common, and such as would be useful for the needs of all the friars. As regarded coverings and beds the poverty amongst them was so extreme that he

Digitized by Google

who had a tattered sheet to spread over the straw imagined himself to possess a soft mattress. He also taught the friars to build poor dwellings and cells of wood, not of stone, and that they should be fashioned roughly; for not only did he detest pretentious houses, but he also had a horror of all superfluity in their furnishing. Neither in tables nor in vessels could he bear to see anything worldly, or that recalled the world, but willed that everything should show forth poverty, and speak of pilgrimage and exile.

How he made all the friars leave a house because it was called "The House of the Friars."

As he was passing through Bologna he heard that a dwelling had been newly erected for the friars. No sooner did he understand that this was called the House of the Friars than he turned to go out of the city, giving strict orders that the friars should leave it at once, and on no account dwell there. All the friars left, even those who were sick; until the Lord Hugo, Bishop of Ostia, and Legate in Lombardy, publicly declared that the house belonged to him. A friar, who at that time lay ill in the house and was ejected, bears witness to this, and has written it here.

Digitized by Google

How he wished to pull down a house the people of Assisi had erected at St. Mary of the Portiuncula.

When the time drew near for the General Chapter which was held every year at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, the people of Assisi, considering that the number of friars increased daily, and that they all flocked there every year, and there was no place for them to put up in except a small thatched cottage, the walls consisting only of branches and clay, took counsel together, and in a few days, with great solicitude and much devotion, erected there a large house of stone and plaster, and did so in the absence of Blessed Francis, and without his consent. When Blessed Francis returned from a certain Province to attend the Chapter, he marvelled greatly at the magnificent house there erected, and fearing that other friars taking example from that house would desire to build similar ones where they lived, and as he wished that spot to be the example and model for all the other places of the Order, almost before the Chapter was over he climbed on the roof of that house, and ordered the friars to do so also, and then with those friars began to pull off and throw down the tiles with which the roof was covered; meaning to destroy it to its very foundations. This they would have done had not some men-at-arms from Assisi, who had come to guard the

Digitized by Google

place, owing to the great number of strangers there congregated to witness the Chapter of the friars, seeing that Blessed Francis, with the other friars, was destroying the house, went up to him and said: "Brother, this house belongs to the Council of Assisi, and we are here on behalf of the Council. Why, therefore, are you trying to destroy our building?" Hearing this, Blessed Francis said, "If it belongs to your Council I have no desire to injure it." Then he and the other friars descended from the roof. From that time and day the people of Assisi decreed that whoever held the office of Chief Magistrate of their territory was bound to keep the house in order, and every year, for a long time, this same law was observed.

Of the reprimand he gave his Vicar for having a small house built there, wherein to recite the Office.

Another time the Vicar of Blessed Francis caused a little house to be built where the friars might rest and recite the Hours, since, by reason of the multitude of friars that flocked there, they had no place wherein to say the Office. For, as no friar was received into the Order except in this place, they all came hither. When the house was finished, Blessed Francis having returned, and being in his cell, heard rumours of this

Digitized by Google

work, and, calling his companion, asked him what the friars were doing. And his companion told him all that had taken place. He at once sent for his Vicar, and said to him: "Brother, this spot is the model and example for the whole Order, and therefore I desire that the friars of this place shall bear with trials and hardships for the love of God, so that other friars who come here shall be able to carry back the report of good example as to poverty to their own places, whereas, if they find here every comfort, they will follow the example by erecting buildings in their own places, saying: 'At St. Mary of the Portiuncula, which is the head house of the Order, there are such and such buildings, it were as well we should erect the like in our other places.'"

How Blessed Francis would not remain in a specially adorned cell, or in one that was called his own.

A very spiritual friar, who was familiar with Blessed Francis, erected at the Hermitage where he lived a little cell in a solitary spot, where Blessed Francis could retire and pray when he came thither. When he arrived at this place the friar took him to the cell, and Blessed Francis said, "This cell is too fine"—it was, indeed, built only of wood, and smoothed with the hatchet—"if you wish me to remain here make it within

Digitized by Google

and without of branches of trees and clay." For the poorer the house or cell the more was he pleased to live therein. When the friar had done this, Blessed Francis remained there several days. Being one day out of the cell when a friar came to see him, and, thereafter, coming to the place where Blessed Francis was, he asked him: "Whence came you, Brother?" He answered, "I come from your cell." Then said Blessed Francis: "Since you have called it mine, let another dwell there and not I." And, in truth, we who were with him, often heard him say: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." And again he would say: "When the Lord remained in the desert, and fasted forty days and forty nights, He did not make for Himself a cell or a house, but found shelter amongst the rocks of the mountain." For this reason, and to follow His example, he would not have it said that a cell or house was his, nor would he allow such to be constructed. If it happened that he said to the friars, "Go and make ready such a cell," yet would he never remain there, remembering the words of the Holy Gospel, "Be not solicitous," &c.

When he was nigh unto death he caused it to be written in his Testament that all the cells and houses of the friars should be of wood

Digitized by Google

and clay, the better to safeguard poverty and humility.

In what manner places were to be selected in the cities, and how they were to be built, according to the intentions of Blessed Francis.

Being one day near Siena, for the malady in his eyes, Master Bonaventure, who had given the place to the friars where the building was erected, said to him: "What think you, Father, of this place?" Blessed Francis asked him, "Would you like me to tell you in what manner the places of the friars should be constructed?" and he answered, "I would, Father." Then said Blessed Francis, "When the friars come to a city where they have no place, and there are those who wish to give them ground where they can build and have a garden and all things needful, they must first consider how much land they require, having always in view the poverty and good example they are bound to show in everything." This he said, because he would not have them overstep the bounds of holy poverty, neither in houses, churches, gardens, or other places, nor that they should be proprietors thereof, but dwell in every place as strangers and pilgrims; hence he did not like that many friars should live together in one place, as it was difficult to observe poverty amongst a great number. And this was ever his intention from

Digitized by Google

the beginning of his conversion until the end; that poverty should be observed in all things. "The friars then having decided how much land is necessary must go to the Bishop of the city and say to him: 'My Lord, such a man wishes to give us some land, for the love of God, and the good of his soul, that we may build thereon. We come to you first, because you are the father and master of all the flock committed to you, and of all the friars who will live in this place; will you allow us, with God's blessing and yours, to build?'" For he always said that the harvest of souls the friars desired to reap was better done by being at peace with the clergy, and, instead of scandalising them, winning them as well as the people, saying: "The Lord has called us for the help of His faithful people, of the clergy and prelates of the Holy Roman Church. Hence by all means in our power we should always love, honour, and reverence them. For this are we called Friars-Minor, that both by our name and actions we should ever set an example of humility to all men. At the beginning of my conversion the Lord placed His word in the mouth of the Bishop of Assisi that he might advise and confirm me in the service of Christ; for this and many other excellent things I honour and respect not only Bishops but also poor priests, desiring to love and reverence them, and look

Digitized by Google

upon them as my masters. When they have received the Bishop's blessing, let them dig a ditch round the land and plant there a hedge, instead of making a wall, in token of poverty and humility. After that, let them build a poor house of wood, plastered with clay, making several little cells where the friars can at times retire to pray, and labour for the sake of honesty and to avoid sloth. Their churches must be small, for they ought not to build a large church to preach in to the people, inasmuch as their great humility and good example are worth more when they go to other churches to preach. And if any Prelates, Clergy, Religious or Seculars, come to their places, the poor houses and small churches will preach to them and edify them more than words." He added, "Often the friars erect large buildings breaking our holy Poverty, or causing murmurs and setting bad example, when either for a better or a holier place, or a larger number of people, they are led by cupidity and avarice to leave their places and destroy them for others that are larger and finer, so that those who have given them alms in the former are scandalised and disturbed. Therefore, it is better the friars should, by erecting small and poor buildings, observe their profession, and set a good example to their neighbours, than by acting contrary to their profession give a bad example to others. But if the friars leave a poor

Digitized by Google

place for one more convenient, for good and sufficient reasons, there will be less scandal."

How the friars, especially those who were prelates and the learned, opposed Blessed Francis with regard to poor localities and dwellings.

When Blessed Francis ordained the churches of the friars should be small, and their houses built solely of wood, plastered with clay, in token of holy Poverty and humility, he wished to begin giving a good example at the place of St. Mary of the Portiuncula by erecting most of the buildings in wood, plastered with clay, as an everlasting memorial to all the friars, present and future, since it was the first and head place of the whole Order; certain friars opposed him in this, saying that as in some provinces wood was more expensive than stone, it did not seem opportune that the houses should be made of wood and clay. But Blessed Francis, being seriously ill and near to death, did not wish to argue with them. For this reason he caused to be written in his Testament: "Let the friars beware of accepting either churches, dwellings, or anything else for their own that is not in accordance with holy Poverty, but let them dwell therein as pilgrims and strangers." And we who were with him when he made the Rule, and nearly all his

Digitized by Google

other writings, bear witness that he inserted there many things to which a number of the friars were opposed, especially our Prelates and learned men, which now would be useful and of value to the Order, but since he greatly feared to cause scandal he unwillingly acceded to their wishes. Nevertheless, he often said: "Woe to those friars who oppose me in that which I know firmly to be the will of God for the greater usefulness and needs of the whole Order, though against my will I have submitted to their desires." Then to us, his companions, he would say: "In this consists my grief and affliction inasmuch as that which I have obtained with much labour, prayer, and meditation from God's mercy for the present and future welfare of the whole Order, other friars by virtue of their learning and false providence oppose, saying, 'This is to be observed, and this not.'"

How he held it to be dishonest to beg for or to accept alms beyond that which was necessary.

Blessed Francis often said to his friars: "Let us not act like thieves in asking for or accepting alms beyond what is actually necessary. I have always taken less than I needed in order that the other poor might not be defrauded of their portion, to do otherwise would be dishonest."

Digitized by Google

How Christ told him that the friars were not to possess anything either in common or privately.

When the Friars-Ministers would have persuaded him to allow the friars common possessions, so that they, being in such great numbers, might have something to fall back upon, Blessed Francis besought Christ in prayer to advise him in this, Who thus replied: "I will withdraw from them everything in private and in common, and I will always provide for this family, however greatly it increases, and support all who have confidence in Me."

His horror of money, and how he punished a Friar on account of it.

This true friend and imitator of Christ, Francis, despising all worldly goods, had most specially a great horror of money, flying from it as from the devil, and teaching his friars both by word and example to do the same. Thus he inspired the friars to hold money in as great detestation and to love it as little as if it were dung. It happened one day that a layman, having come to St. Mary of the Portiuncula to pray, placed an offering of money on the Cross before leaving, which a friar of great simplicity took up and threw on the ledge of a window. When this was told Blessed Francis, the friar, seeing

Digitized by Google

he was found out, came and prostrate offered himself to be scourged. Blessed Francis bitterly reproved him, and ordered him to take the money from the window with his mouth and carry it beyond the boundary hedge of the place and throw it on the dungheap. All who saw and heard this were filled with fear and were led to hold money as vile as dung, and this lesson gave them new courage to despise and disdain money.

Of the avoidance of soft and many garments, and the practice of patience when in need.

This man, endowed with virtue from above, was warmed far more internally by the Divine fire than externally by warm clothing. He detested excess of clothing and, where there was no necessity, the use of soft and fine cloth in the Order. He held it to be the sign of an enfeebled soul to desire that which was not according to reason but only an indulgence of the appetite for superfluities, saying: "What remains to the soul that has declined from spirituality but a return to the pleasures of the flesh when the sensual appetite pleads necessity, and the carnal senses influence the conscience? If my brother is really in want, and hastens at once to satisfy it, what merit shall he have? Truly, he had an opportunity to merit reward,

Digitized by Google

but he hastened to show he was not willing to take it. For not to bear deprivations patiently is nothing less than a return to Egypt." He never wished the friars to possess more than two tunics, which he allowed to be lined with pieces sewn together; fine cloth he detested, and sternly reproved those who wore it, and in order to encourage them by his own example wore a rough sack outside his tunic. Indeed, at the moment of his death he ordered that the habit for his burial should be covered with sacking. The friars who, because of illness or any other needs, had to wear a soft habit next to the skin, were obliged to have the outside one coarse and poor in order to show forth austerity. He would say in much grief: "It will come to pass that when austerity is relaxed and tepidity prevails that the sons of poor fathers will go clad in the fineness of scarlet cloth, without any other difference than the colour."

How he would not indulge his own body in anything he believed the other friars had to go without.

When Blessed Francis was at the hermitage of St. Eleutherius, opposite Rieti, on account of the excessive cold he lined his own habit and that of his companion Richer with some pieces, for he usually wore but one tunic. Soon after,

Digitized by Google

returning from prayer, he said with much gladness to his companion, "Since I have to be the model and example for all the friars, although my body needs a lined tunic, yet must I consider my other friars who may also need it yet cannot have it, and suffer in myself their deprivations, and when they see this in me they will bear their own with greater patience and fortitude." What and how many necessities he denied his own body in order to give the friars a good example, and induce them to bear their own deprivations, we who were with him could neither say nor write. After the friars increased so greatly in numbers, he studied chiefly how to teach them by his deeds rather than by words what they should do and what they should avoid.

How he felt ashamed when he saw any one poorer than himself.

Meeting one day a poor man, and greatly pitying his poverty, he said to his companion, "The poverty of this man shames us and reproves our poverty, for it always makes me feel greatly ashamed when I see any one poorer than myself, who have chosen holy Poverty for my Lady, and for my spiritual and corporal treasure, so that the voice of this has gone throughout the world that I profess poverty before God and man."

Digitized by Google

In what manner he induced and taught the first friars to go out and ask for alms.

When Blessed Francis began to have friars he rejoiced much in their conversion, and that God had given him such good companions, and he felt so much love and reverence for them that he did not tell them to go out and ask for alms. Especially as it appeared to him they would be ashamed to go, and compassionating their shame, he went out alone every day to beg for alms. But as he was a man delicately reared in the world, and much weakened by his constant abstinence and mortifications, he was tired out, and though they began to see he could not continue this labour by himself, yet, not fully recognising this, they were not discreet enough to say, "We also wish to go out and beg for alms." Then he said to them: "My dearest Brothers, do not be ashamed to go out and ask for alms since our Lord made Himself poor for us in this world, setting us an example of true poverty. This is our inheritance which our Lord Jesus Christ acquired and left to us and to all who, according to His example, wish to live in holy Poverty. In truth I tell you that many of the most noble and saintly of this age will enter this Religion and count it a great honour and favour to seek for alms. Go forth, therefore, with confidence and glad hearts for alms, with the blessing

Digitized by Google

of God. And more gladly should you do this than he who for one penny received a hundred, for you offer the love of God to those from whom you beg, saying, 'For the love of God give us an alms,' compared with which heaven and earth are as nothing." As the friars were too few to send out in couples, he sent each one separately to the castles and villages. And when they returned and showed Blessed Francis the alms they had gathered, one would say to the other, "I have begged more alms than you," which made Blessed Francis gay and joyful. From that time every one gladly asked leave to go out and beg for alms.

That he would not have the friars be solicitous and provide for the morrow.

At that time, when Blessed Francis and the friars that were with him lived in strict poverty, observing literally the Holy Gospel, since the day when the Lord had revealed to him that he and his friars were to live according to the precepts of the Holy Gospel, he forbade the friar who cooked for the other friars to steep the vegetables in hot water the day before, as is the custom, in order to observe the Gospel precept, *Take no thought for the morrow.* So this friar left off steeping the vegetables till after matins on the day they were to be eaten. Hence for a long

Digitized by Google

time many friars in many places observed this precept, not asking nor receiving more alms than was needful for the day, especially those who lived in cities.

How by word and example he reproved the friars who prepared a sumptuous repast on Christmas Day.

When a certain Friar-Minister came to visit Blessed Francis at the Friary at Rieti, to keep the Feast of the Lord's Nativity with him, the friars, taking occasion of the minister's visit and the Feast, set out the table with some profusion, covering it with fine white napkins and vessels of glass. When Blessed Francis came from his cell he saw the table raised and thus decked out. Then he went out secretly, and taking the staff and hood of a poor man who had come there that day, called to one of his companions in a low voice, and left the house without any of the other friars knowing it. The companion remained near the door, and meanwhile the friars sat down to table, for Blessed Francis did not wish the friars to wait for him if he did not come at meal times. After a little while he knocked at the door, which was opened by his companion, and with the staff in his hand and the hood over his shoulder he stood in the door of the place where the friars were eating, and,

Digitized by Google

like a pilgrim and pauper, cried, "For the love of the Lord God give an alms to this poor and infirm pilgrim." The minister and other friars at once recognised him, and the minister replied, "Brother, we also are poor, and as we are many we need all the alms bestowed upon us, but for the love of God, upon Whom you call, we will give you of the alms the Lord has sent us." When he came in and stood at the table the minister gave him a bowl out of which he ate, and some bread. And accepting it humbly he sat by the fire, and sighing, he said to the friars: "When I saw this raised table so finely decked it appeared not to be the table of poor Religious who, as a rule, go daily from door to door seeking alms; for we, beloved, are more bound to set an example of Christ's poverty and humility than other Religious, since He has called us to this vocation, and to profess it before God and man. It seems to me to be acting more like a Friar-Minor, and the feasts of the Lord and the Saints to be more honoured in want and poverty, by which the Saints are enriched in Heaven, than by daintiness and superfluity, which draws the soul from Heaven." At this the friars were filled with shame, since they knew he spoke the pure truth; and many amongst them were moved to tears to see him seated on the ground, and how simply and purely he desired to correct and teach them.

Digitized by Google

He admonished the friars that they should keep their tables clean and humble, so that seculars who came might be edified, and the poor who were invited by the friars could sit on equal terms amongst them, the poor men not sitting on the floor with the friars at a raised table.

How the Lord Bishop of Ostia wept and was edified at the poverty of the Friars.

The Lord Bishop of Ostia, who was afterwards Pope Gregory, having come to the Chapter of the friars at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, entered the house to visit the dormitories of the friars with many knights and clerics, and seeing that the friars had their beds on the ground, and nothing but a little straw to lie on, and some poor coverings very worn and patched, wept bitterly before all present, saying: "See where the friars sleep while we wretched ones use so many superfluities. What will become of us?" Therefore he and all with him were greatly edified. In the same way he saw no tables, as the friars in that place always ate on the bare floor.

How the soldiers obtained what they wanted by begging from door to door, according to the advice of Blessed Francis.

When Blessed Francis was at Bagnara, above Nocera, his feet began to swell more than usual,

Digitized by Google

for he was suffering from dropsy, and dangerously ill. When the citizens of Assisi heard this, a number of soldiers came in great haste to that place to bring him back to Assisi, fearing he might die and others take possession of his holy body. On their way back they stopped at a walled town in the territory of Assisi, and, while Blessed Francis rested at the house of a poor man who willingly gave him shelter, the soldiers went about the town to buy food, but could obtain none. Returning to Blessed Francis they said to him by way of a jest: "Brother, you will have to give us some of your alms, for here we can find nothing to eat." Blessed Francis with great fervour of spirit answered: "You have not found anything because you trusted in your flies of money and not in God; return now to the same houses where you went before trying to buy, and, putting aside shame, beg alms for the love of God, and these inspired by the Holy Ghost will give you in abundance all you need."

Then they returned and begged for alms as Blessed Francis had told them, and those people of whom they asked alms, with great joy, gave them in abundance all they needed to eat. And the soldiers seeing in this a miracle, returned praising God with much gladness to Blessed Francis. Thus, Blessed Francis counted it a great dignity and honour in the sight of God and men to beg alms for the love of the Lord God,

Digitized by Google

since all things created by the Heavenly Father to the use of men, for the love of His beloved Son, were freely granted alike to the worthy and unworthy by way of alms. He was wont to say that he who served God joyfully should be more willing to beg alms than one who, for the sake of being generous and courteous, should say: "To him who will give me the value of one penny I will return a thousand pieces of gold;" for the servant of God asking alms for the love of God gives in exchange that, in comparison of which, all in heaven and upon earth is as nothing. For this reason, when the friars were but few, and even after when they increased in numbers, and went preaching throughout the world, when invited to dine by the rich and noble, they always before the dinner hour begged first for alms to set a good example to the other friars and to keep faith with the Lady Poverty. And many a time when Blessed Francis was invited in this manner, and was asked by his host why he was not punctual in arriving, he would answer: "For nothing will I ever forego my royal dignity and noble heritage nor that of my brethren, which is to beg alms from door to door." Sometimes those who had invited him would go with him, accepting the alms collected by Blessed Francis, which they would out of devotion guard as relics. And he who writes this many times saw these things and bears witness to them.

Digitized by Google

How he went first and collected alms before coming to the Cardinal's table.

Blessed Francis going one day to visit the Lord Cardinal of Ostia, who was afterwards Pope Gregory, before the dinner hour went secretly collecting alms from door to door, and when he returned my Lord of Ostia was already at table with many knights and nobles. When Blessed Francis entered he went up to the Cardinal and placed before him the alms he had collected, and then sat down in the place allotted to him next to the Cardinal, who always liked to have him near him. And the Cardinal was somewhat vexed that Blessed Francis had gone out to collect alms and put them on the table, but because of the other guests he said nothing. After he had eaten a little Blessed Francis took his alms and gave some to the knights and chaplains of the Lord Cardinal for the love of God. They received the alms with great devotion, uncovering and bowing their heads, and some ate of them and some reserved theirs out of devotion. My Lord of Ostia was much pleased at their devotion, the more so as the alms were of common, not wheaten, bread. After the meal the Cardinal went to his own room taking Blessed Francis with him, and lifting up his arms clasped Blessed Francis to his breast with great gladness and exultation, saying to him: "Why, my most

Digitized by Google

simple Brother, did you put me to shame to-day by coming to my house, which is also the house of your friars, after first collecting alms?" Blessed Francis replied to him: "In this, my lord, I have shown you the greater honour; for he who does his duty and is obedient to his master does honour to his lord," adding: "It is needful that I should be the model and example of your poor men, especially as in this Order the friars are and must be Friars-Minor in deed and in name, for the love of God and by the unction of the Holy Spirit Who teaches them in all things to be humble and submissive in the service of their brethren. There are now, and ever will be, those who from false shame will disdain to collect alms or to perform any servile work, not wishing to humiliate themselves, for which cause I am bound to teach by my actions those who are and will be of our Order, so that neither now nor in the time to come shall they be able to excuse themselves before God. When I am with you, who are our Apostolic Lord, and other magnates and rich men of the world, who, for the love of the Lord God, with much devotion not only receive me into your houses but even compel me to come, I do not wish to be ashamed of going out for alms, but I wish to have and hold this before God as the highest nobility and royal dignity, in honour of Him Who, being Lord of all, desired to be the servant of all, and Who,

Digitized by Google

being rich and glorious in majesty, became poor and despicable in our lowliness. Therefore I desire that the present friars, and those in the future, should know that I feel more consolation, both of body and soul, when I sit down to eat with them at their poor table, and see before me the poor alms they have collected for the love of God, than when I am seated at yours and those of the other lords, that are spread with rich viands in abundance and manifold variety. For the bread of alms is holy bread, which sanctifies to the praise and glory of the Lord, hence when the friars go to beg they should first of all say, 'Blessed and praised be the Lord God!' and afterwards should say, 'Give us an alms for the love of God.'"

At this exposition of Blessed Francis the Cardinal was greatly edified, and said to him, "My son, do whatever seems best in your eyes, for truly God is with you and you are with Him."

It was the wish of Blessed Francis, which he often expressed, that no friar should let the day pass without going forth for alms, both for the great merit he would gain then by so doing, and to conquer any shame he might feel in doing so hereafter. Therefore, the more noble and higher in birth a friar was, the more joy and edification he had in him when he saw him begging for alms or performing any servile work, such as it was usual at that time for the friars to do.

Digitized by Google

Of the friar who would neither pray nor work, but would eat well.

At the beginning of the Order, when the friars were at Rivo Torto, near Assisi, there was amongst them one friar who would not pray, work, nor ask for alms, but only eat. Considering this, Blessed Francis knew by the Holy Spirit that he was a carnal man, and said to him, "Brother Fly, go your way, since you consume the labour of the brethren, and are slothful in the work of the Lord, like the idle and barren drone who earns nothing and does not work, but consumes the labour and earnings of the working bee." He, therefore, went his way, and as he was a carnally-minded man he neither sought for mercy nor did he obtain it.

With what joy he met a poor man who was giving praise to God on his way back from collecting alms.

At a time when Blessed Francis was staying at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, a certain holy poor man was coming along the road, returning from Assisi, where he had been to solicit alms, and sang as he went along the praises of the Lord with a loud and cheerful voice. As he was passing the church of St. Mary Blessed Francis heard him, and immediately went out

Digitized by Google

into the road to meet him with great fervour and gladness, and joyfully kissed his shoulder on which he bore the wallet containing the alms. And he took the wallet from his shoulder and carried it to the house of the friars, saying before them all, "Thus do I desire my friars should go and collect alms, gladly and joyfully praising God."

How it was revealed to him by God that the Brethren were to call themselves Friars-Minor, and were to preach peace and salvation.

On one occasion Blessed Francis said, "The Religion and life of the Friars-Minor is that of the little flock for whom in these later times the Son of God petitioned His Heavenly Father, saying, 'My Father, I pray Thee to create and make a gift to Me of a new and humble people, who shall at the present be more humble and poor in spirit than any who have gone before them, and shall be content to have Me as their sole possession.' And the Father, listening to the Son, said, 'My Son, be it done as Thou hast asked.'"

Then Blessed Francis said that God wished and revealed to him that they should be called Friars-Minor, since these were the poor and humble people the Son of God had asked from His Father, and of this people the same Son of

Digitized by Google

God spoke when He said in the Holy Gospel: *Fear not, little flock, for your Father will give you a kingdom;* and again, *Whatsoever ye have done to the least of my brethren, you have done to Me.* And although God had spoken thus of all the poor in spirit, yet did He predict in a special manner the Friars-Minor who would come into His Church. And since it was revealed to Blessed Francis that they were to be called Friars-Minor, he had this written in the Rule he took to Pope Innocent III., who approved and confirmed and afterwards announced it to all in the Consistory.

In like manner the Lord revealed to Blessed Francis the salutation the friars were to give, and this, also, he had written in his Testament, saying, "The Lord revealed to me that our salutation is to be, 'The Lord give you peace.'" At the beginning of the Order, as he was walking with a certain friar, who was one of the twelve first chosen, that friar saluted all the men and women on the road, and the labourers in the fields, saying, "The Lord give you peace." And because the people had never heard the like salutation given before by any Religious, many were greatly astonished, and others said, with indignation, "What do you mean by your salutation?" At this the friar felt abashed, and said to Blessed Francis, "I pray you let me salute them in some other manner." But

Digitized by Google

Blessed Francis answered him: "Let them talk, for they do not understand the word of God; but be of good cheer, and be not ashamed, for the noble and great ones of the world will honour you and the other friars for these words. It is not any wonder the Lord should desire to have a new and little people, singular and different in their lives and words from those that have preceded them, and content to have Him alone Who is sweeter than all."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

OF CHARITY AND COMPASSION AND LOVING-KINDNESS TO OUR NEIGHBOURS.

And first how he comforted a friar who was dying of hunger by eating with him, and how he admonished the friars to be discreet in doing penance.

AT that time, when Blessed Francis began to have friars, and lived with them at Rivo Torto, near Assisi, it happened one night when all the friars were at rest, about midnight one of them called out, "I am dying, I am dying!" At this all the friars were stupefied with fear, but Blessed Francis rising up, said, "Get up, Brothers, and kindle a light." And when the light was kindled, he asked, "Who is it that said 'I am dying'?" and a friar replied, "It is I." Blessed Francis asked, "What has happened to you, Brother, and why are you dying?" He replied, "I am dying of hunger." Immediately Blessed Francis had a meal prepared, and, like a man full of charity and discretion, sat by his side to eat with him, that he should feel no shame at eating by himself, and according to his wish all

Digitized by Google

the other friars also sat down to eat. Now this friar, as well as the rest, being but recently converted to God, mortified their bodies beyond all measure, and after the said friar was revived Blessed Francis said to them all: "My best beloved, I tell you that you must each one consider your own nature, for though some of you have strength enough to do with little food, those who require more are not to imitate them, but let each one, according to his own needs, so consider the wants of the body as to be able to serve the spirit. Although we are bound not to indulge to excess in food, yet must we beware of too strict an abstinence, for the Lord desires mercy, not sacrifice." He added: "That which I have done, dearest Brothers, in eating with this our Brother, that he might not be ashamed of eating alone, I have done out of charity and necessity; but I say to you that in the future I shall not do the like, for it would be neither religious nor seemly, but I desire and request you and all our friars to give, according to our poverty, that satisfaction to the body which is needful."

For the first friars, and those that came after them, went to great extremes in their penances, abstaining from food and drink, by keeping long vigils in the cold, by the coarseness of their garments, and their manual labour. They wore next to their skin iron girdles, steel vests, and

Digitized by Google

hair shirts, so that the blessed Father, seeing that this would injure the friars, and, indeed, in a short while several became infirm, made a clause and proclaimed it in a Chapter forbidding the friars to wear anything next to their skin except the tunic. We who were with him bear witness that, although he was ever humane and discreet towards the friars, he desired that in the use of food and all things the friars of all time should ever observe the poverty and simplicity inculcated by our Order. For this our most blessed Father, from the time of his conversion until the end of his life, treated his body with great austerity, although he was by nature slender and delicate, and had lived luxuriously in the world. When at one time he saw the friars were falling away from the virtues of poverty and simplicity in food and other things, he said in a sermon to some of the friars, intending it for all of them: "The friars consider that what I take is not sufficient for my body, but since I must be the model and example for all the friars I desire to use and be content with little and poor food, in all things detesting sumptuousness and luxury."

How he comforted a sick friar by eating grapes with him.

Another time, when Blessed Francis was living at the same place, a holy friar who had grown

Digitized by Google

old in the Order fell ill there and was very weak. Blessed Francis looking at him had great compassion for him; for at that time the friars, whether well or ill, gladly observed poverty as if it were abundance, not taking medicine when sick, but rather that which was unwholesome for the body. Blessed Francis said to himself: "If that friar would eat ripe grapes in the morning I believe he would be cured." And as he thought, so he did. Rising early in the morning he called the friar secretly, and took him to a vineyard near the place, and choosing a vine that had good grapes fit for eating, he sat down by the vine with the friar and began to eat grapes, that this friar should not feel ashamed at eating alone. And no sooner had the friar eaten than he was cured of all his ills, and both together rose and gave thanks to God. And all the days of his life this friar remembered the pity and compassion shown him by the blessed Father, and would relate what had happened, with great devotion, to the other friars.

How he despoiled himself and his Companion in order to clothe a poor woman.

Near Celano, in the winter, when Blessed Francis wore a piece of cloth folded in the fashion of a mantle, which had been lent him by a friend of the friars, he met a poor old

Digitized by Google

woman who begged for alms, whereupon he took the cloth off, although it belonged to another, and gave it to her saying, "Go make yourself a garment, for you need it." The old woman laughed like one stupefied, whether from joy or fear I know not, took the cloth and ran off with it, and, lest it should be taken from her, began to cut it up with the scissors; but not finding the cloth sufficient for a dress, she again had recourse to the goodness of the blessed Father, and returning told him there was not enough cloth for a dress. The Saint then turned his eyes towards his companion who wore such another piece of cloth on his back, and said to him, "Do you hear what this poor woman says? For the love of God let us endure the cold and give that cloth, so she may have enough to make a dress." At once his companion did as he had done. Thus they denuded themselves that the poor woman might be clothed.

How he considered it dishonest not to give to those who were in greater need than himself.

One day coming back from Siena they met a poor man. Then said he to his companion: "It is fitting we should give this poor man his mantle, for it has only been lent to us till we met with some one poorer than ourselves." His companion knowing the kind Father's own necessity,

Digitized by Google

remonstrated with him in providing for others and neglecting himself. To whom Blessed Francis answered, "I do not wish to be a thief, and I should be held for one if we do not give to those in greater need." Therefore the blessed Father gave his mantle to the poor man.

How he gave his new mantle to another poor man, conditionally.

Near Celle di Cortona, Blessed Francis wore a new mantle the friars had got for him with some trouble. To him came a poor man deploring the loss of his wife, whose death left him with a family in great poverty. The Saint pitying him, said: "I will give you this mantle on condition that you do not part with it to any, unless they give you a good exchange for it." When the friars heard this they went to the poor man and tried to get the mantle from him; but the poor man, seeing the blessed Father, held it fast with closed hands, and defended himself. In the end the friars procured the redemption of the mantle, taking care that a good price should be paid to the poor man.

How a certain poor man, by virtue of the alms of Blessed Francis, forgave his lord the injuries he had done him, and ceased to hate him.

At Colla, in the Lordship of Perugia, Blessed Francis received a certain poor man whom he

Digitized by Google

had known formerly in the world, and said to him: "Brother, how does it fare with you?" He, being angry against his lord, with great bitterness of soul replied, "Thanks to my lord, on whom be the curse of God, I am in a sorry plight, for he has deprived me of all my substance." Blessed Francis, seeing he was thus nourishing mortal hatred, had pity on his soul, and said to him, "My Brother, forgive your lord that you may save your soul, and possibly he may return you what he has taken from you, but now you are losing it and your own soul as well." The man replied, "I cannot forgive him unless he first returns my substance." Then Blessed Francis said, "Take this mantle which I give you, and I pray you forgive your lord for the love of God." Then the man's heart being touched and softened by such goodness, he forgave his lord the injuries he had done him.

How another time he gave his mantle to a poor woman who was suffering with the same complaint in her eyes as himself.

A certain poor woman of Machilone came to Rieti suffering with her eyes, and sought the same surgeon who attended Blessed Francis, and who said to him, "Brother, a woman suffering with eye disease has come to me, but her poverty is so great that I shall have to pay her expenses."

Digitized by Google

He hearing this was filled with pity, and calling one of the friars who held the office of Guardian, said to him, "Brother Guardian, ought we not to return what we owe to another?" who asked, "What ought we to return, Brother, and who is the other?" And he replied, "This mantle which is lent us, ought we not to give it up to the poor sick woman?" The Guardian replied, "Brother, do as it seems best to you." Then Blessed Francis, joyfully calling a certain holy man with whom he was familiar, said to him, "Take this mantle and twelve loaves of bread, and carry them to the poor woman who has disease of the eyes, and say to her, 'a poor man to whom you lent this mantle returns it you with thanks, take it, for it is yours.'" He going swiftly to the poor woman told her what Blessed Francis had said. She, however, thinking they were making a fool of her, answered with fear and shame, "Go away, and leave me in peace; I do not know what you mean." But when the messenger placed the mantle and twelve loaves in her hands, she, seeing he spoke the truth, with fear and delight accepted the gift, giving thanks to God. Then, being afraid that it would be taken back, she rose secretly in the night and joyfully returned to her own home. But Blessed Francis had arranged with the Guardian to provide for her daily as long as she remained. We who were with him bear witness to his exceed-

Digitized by Google

ing charity and pity, not only for the friars, but also for other poor both sick and in health, depriving himself, whether he were ill or well, of the most necessary things the friars had got for him with much solicitude and trouble, first trying to coax us lest we should be disturbed thereat, and then with great inward and outward gladness giving to the poor that which himself could little spare. Hence the Minister-General and Guardian forbade him to give away his tunic to other friars without their leave. For the friars, out of devotion to him, would beg his habit, which he would give them, sometimes dividing it, giving part away and keeping a part for himself, for he never wore but one tunic.

How he gave his tunic to some friars who begged it of him for the love of God.

It happened once when he was going through a certain province preaching, he fell in with two friars of France, who, after receiving much consolation from him, begged him to give them his tunic for the love of God. As soon as he heard them ask him for the love of God he at once took off his tunic and gave it them, remaining without for nearly an hour. In this way whenever he was asked anything for the love of God, whether it were his tunic or cord or anything else, he never refused, however much he

Digitized by Google

needed it, though he would reprove the friars when he heard them for the most trivial matters take the Name of the Love of God in vain. He would say: "So great and precious is the Love of God that it should be named very rarely and only in great necessity."

Then one of these friars took off his own tunic and put it on him. For when he gave away his habit or any part thereof he could never get another one quickly enough, as he would only wear an old tunic, well patched inside and out, and seldom would he wear one of new cloth, preferring that which another friar had worn for some time. Sometimes he would obtain part of his habit from one friar and the other part from another. On account of his many infirmities, and chill of the stomach and spleen, they would line his habit with pieces of new cloth. This manner of poverty in his clothing he observed until the year of his departing to God, when by reason of dropsy and his other ailments the friars made for him several tunics, so that he might have a change both day and night.

How he tried to give a poor man a piece of cloth.

There came one day to the place where Blessed Francis was a certain poor man, who begged the friars to give him a bit of cloth for

Digitized by Google

the love of God. Blessed Francis hearing this said to one of the friars, "Search the house and see if you can find a piece of any kind of cloth, and give it to this poor man." When he had searched through the whole house the friar said he could not find any. But in order that the poor man should not go away with his wants unrelieved, Blessed Francis secretly, so that the Guardian should not see and forbid him, took a knife and, retiring into a hidden place, tried to cut out a piece of cloth from the inside of his tunic. The Guardian, suspecting this, went to him and forbade him to give it, for it was very cold, and he was very infirm and chilled. Then Blessed Francis said to him, "If you will not let me give this piece, it is above all needful you should find another for this poor man." Upon which the other friars gave bits of their habit to the poor man for the love of Blessed Francis.

When he went about preaching, sometimes on foot, sometimes on an ass because of his infirmities, and in case of the last necessity on horseback, but this, indeed, he never did until a little time before his death, if any friar lent him a mantle he would take it only on condition that he might give it to any poor person who came to him or whom he might meet, as long as he felt convinced he really was in want of it.

Digitized by Google

How he induced Brother Giles to clothe a poor man.

At the beginning of the Order, when he was at Rivo Torto with two companions, for no others had he as yet, a certain Giles, who became his third companion, came out of the world to him, desiring to follow his way of life. When he had remained there some days in the garments he wore in the world, there came to that place a poor man begging alms of Blessed Francis. Blessed Francis, turning to Giles, said, "Give our poor brother your mantle," who at once joyfully took the mantle off his back and gave it to the beggar. Then it seemed to him that God had given fresh grace to his heart when he so cheerfully gave his mantle to the poor. After Blessed Francis received him into the Order he grew ever in virtue until he attained the highest perfection.

Of the penance he gave the friar who rashly judged a poor man.

When Blessed Francis had come to a certain place of the friars, near Roccabrizia, in order to preach, a poor infirm man came to him. With great compassion Blessed Francis spoke to his companion of his poverty and infirmity, and his companion replied, "It is true, Brother, he is poor enough, but in all the province there is

Digitized by Google

none who more desires to be rich." Then Blessed Francis severely reproving him, he confessed his fault. Blessed Francis said: "Will you perform the penance I give you?" he answered, "Willingly will I perform it." Then said he: "Go, take off your tunic, and throw yourself barebacked at the feet of this poor man, telling him in what manner you have sinned by detracting him, and ask him to pray for you." And he went away and did all as Blessed Francis had told him. When he had risen and put on his tunic he returned to Blessed Francis, who said to him, "Do you know how you sinned against him, or rather against Christ? When you see a poor man you should remember in Whose name he came, that of Christ, Who took upon Himself our poverty and infirmity. This man's poverty and infirmity is for us, as it were, a mirror, wherein we can gaze and devoutly consider the poverty and infirmity of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Of the New Testament given to a poor woman, the mother of two friars.

Another time, when he was living at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, a poor old woman, who had two sons in the Order, came to beg of Blessed Francis. At once Blessed Francis said to Brother Peter Cataneo, who at that time was Minister-General, "Have you anything we could

Digitized by Google

give to our mother?" For he spoke of the mothers of the friars as if they were the mothers of himself and all the other friars. Brother Peter answered: "In all the house there is nothing we can give her, that is nothing that would satisfy her bodily needs. In the Church we have only one New Testament from which to read the lessons at Matins." For at that time the friars had no Breviaries and very few Psalters. Then Blessed Francis said to him: "Give our mother the Testament that she may sell it for her needs, for I firmly believe this will be more pleasing to God and the Blessed Virgin than that we should read out of it." And so it was given to her. Of him it might be said and written as of holy Job: *From my infancy mercy grew up with me, and it came on me from my mother's womb.* But we who were with him should never end were we to relate and write all we have heard or have seen with our own eyes of his charity and pity towards the friars and the poor.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

OF THE PERFECTION OF HOLY HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE IN HIMSELF AND OTHERS.

And first how he resigned the office of General, and made Brother Peter Cataneo Minister-General.

IN order more perfectly to practise the virtue of holy Humility, some years after his conversion, in a Chapter at which all the friars were present, he resigned the office of General, saying, "From now I am dead to you, but behold here Brother Peter Cataneo, to whom I and all of you owe obedience." And prostrating himself on the ground before all, he promised him obedience and reverence. At this all the friars wept bitterly, and with many sighs lamented being orphaned of such a Father. The blessed Father then rose, and raising his eyes to heaven, and clasping his hands, said: "Lord I commend to Thee this family, which till now Thou hast committed to me, since because of my infirmities, which Thou knowest, Sweet Lord, I cannot take care of them, I commend them to ministers, who in the Day of Judgment will have to render an account before Thee, Lord, if through their negli-

Digitized by Google

gence, bad example, or harshness, any brother should perish." And from that day till the day of his death he was subject to all, acting in all things more humbly than any of the others.

How he gave up his companions, not desiring to have a special companion.

Another time he gave up all his companions to his Vicar, saying, "I do not wish to enjoy any singular prerogative of liberty by having a special companion, but let the friars give me a companion from place to place as God shall inspire them," and added, "I saw a blind man but now who had a dog to lead him, and I would not be better off than he." This was his glory—to avoid all appearance of singularity, and to have in himself the virtue of Christ.

That he resigned his office on account of bad Prelates.

Being once asked by a friar why he had withdrawn the friars from his care, and placed them in strange hands as if they did not belong to him, he said: "My son, I love the friars as much as I possibly can; if they would follow in my footsteps I would have loved them still more and would not have been estranged from them. But there are a certain number amongst the Prelates who have turned them to another way, placing

Digitized by Google

before them the example of men of old, and setting my admonitions at naught. But the why and wherefore of their actions will be better known in the end." When, sometime after he was seriously ill, in great vehemence of spirit he sat up in his bed, crying: "Who are they who have snatched my Order and my friars out of my hands? If I go to the General Chapter, I will show them what my intention is!"

How in humility he begged meat for the sick, and exhorted them to be patient.

Blessed Francis was not ashamed to go into the public places of the cities in order to beg meat for the sick friars, at the same time exhorting those that were ill to bear their pains patiently, and not to complain if all their wants were not fully satisfied. Hence in the first Rule he caused to be written: "I pray my Brothers when they are ill not to indulge in anger or complaints either against God or the Friars, nor ask with too great insistence for medicines, nor be too solicitous for the body which must die, for it is the enemy of the soul, but in all adversity to give thanks, desiring in all things to be conformed to the will of God, since He has designed them for life eternal, Who proves them by sickness and scourges, as He has said, *I chasten those I love.*"

Digitized by Google

Of the humble answers made by Blessed Francis and Dominic when asked by the Cardinal whether they would desire any of their friars to be Prelates in the Church.

In the city of Rome when those two shining luminaries of the world, Blessed Francis and Dominic were together with my Lord of Ostia, who was afterwards Pope, sweetly discoursing on the things of God, my Lord of Ostia said to them: "In the primitive Church the Pastors and Prelates were poor men full of fervent charity and not of covetousness. Why, therefore, should not your friars be made Bishops and Prelates to set an example above all others?" Then there arose between the Saints a humble and devout contention, not of precedence, but of deference, as to who should be the first to reply. But in the end the humility of Blessed Francis triumphed in not being the first to answer, and Blessed Dominic responded in humble obedience saying, "My Lord, my friars are called to a high station if they will but recognise it, and as for me, never, with my leave, shall they accept any great dignities."

Then, Blessed Francis bowing before the Lord Bishop said: "My Lord, my friars are called Friars-Minor, and cannot ever become Friars-Major, for their vocation teaches them to remain in lowliness, and to follow in the

Digitized by Google

footsteps of the humility of Christ, that they may be exalted amongst the Saints. Hence if you desire they should bear fruit in the Church of God, keep and preserve them in the state of their vocation, and if they should climb on high push them down by force, and never allow them to obtain any ecclesiastical dignity." This was the answer of these Saints, and when they had ended the Lord Bishop of Ostia was greatly edified thereat, and gave thanks to God.

When they left together Blessed Dominic begged Blessed Francis to give him the cord he wore. Blessed Francis refused out of humility that which the other asked for out of love. Nevertheless, the happy piety of the supplicant was victorious, and the cord of Blessed Francis, conceded by the fervour of charity, was girded round Blessed Dominic under his habit, and ever after worn by him out of devotion. Then the one placed his hands between the hands of the other, sweetly commending themselves to each other, and Blessed Dominic said to Blessed Francis: "I desire, Brother Francis, that our Orders, yours and mine, should be one, and live in the Church on the same footing." When at last they parted, Blessed Dominic said to those around him: "Verily, I tell you, all Religious should imitate this holy man, Francis, so high is the perfection of his sanctity."

Digitized by Google

How as a foundation of humility he wished the friars to attend on Lepers.

Blessed Francis, from the beginning of his conversion, inspired by God, like a wise and prudent builder set himself to found his Order on a firm rock, that is the great humility and poverty of the Son of God, calling his Order Friars-Minor, for the sake of greater lowliness. Hence at the beginning of the Order he desired the friars to stay in the hospitals of the lepers, and to serve them, laying their foundation on holy humility. Therefore, whoever came into the Order, noble or simple, amongst other things it was said to them that they must humbly tend the lepers, and stay in their houses. In the first Rule it could be read: "Desiring to possess nothing under Heaven except holy poverty, whereby, in God, they are nourished in this world corporally and spiritually, and in the future will come into their heavenly inheritance." Thus he built on the foundation of the greatest poverty and humility both for himself and for others, so that he who was a great leader in the Church of God made himself abject, not only in the Church, but also amongst his brethren. This lowliness in thought and desire is his glorious exaltation in the sight of God and man.

Digitized by Google

How in all his good words and deeds he desired to give the sole honour to God.

Preaching at Rieti to the people in the square of the city, he had ended his sermon, and the Bishop of that city, a discreet and spiritual man, rose up and said to the people: "God, Who from the beginning, when He planted and built His Church, has always enlightened it by holy men, who have enriched it by word and example, has now at this time enlightened it by this poor, despised, and illiterate man, Francis. For this reason are you bound to adore and love God, for He has not done the like to every nation."

Having spoken these words the Bishop descended from the place where he had been preaching, and entered the Cathedral, where Blessed Francis, coming to him, threw himself at his feet, saying: "I say to you, my Lord Bishop, no man has ever paid me more honour than you have done me to-day, for other men say, 'This is a holy man,' attributing glory and honour to me and not the Creator; but you, who are full of prudence, discriminate between the precious and the vile."

Whenever Blessed Francis was praised and heard himself called holy, he would answer: "I am not as yet assured I may not have sons and daughters, for if at any time God

Digitized by Google

should take away the treasure He has confided to me what would remain to me but a body and soul such as even infidels have? Rather do I believe that if God had given to robbers and pagans such great graces as He has given to me, they would have served Him more faithfully. Therefore, as in the images of our Lord and the Blessed Virgin when painted on wood, you give honour to the Lord and the Blessed Virgin, the wood and the painting retaining none for themselves, so the servant of God is, as it were, a picture of God, and like the wood and the painting is nothing in himself, to God alone belonging the honour and glory, and shame and tribulation to himself while he lives amidst the miseries of this world."

How till his death he desired one of his companions to be placed over him as Guardian, and he himself to live in subjection.

Wishing to remain until death in perfect humility and subjection, some time before his death Blessed Francis said to the Minister-General, "I wish you would commit your authority over me to one of my companions whom I can obey in your stead, since I desire to retain the virtue of obedience in myself both in life and in death." From that time until his death he had over him one of his com-

Digitized by Google

panions as his Guardian, whom he obeyed in the place of the Minister-General, and of this he said one day to his companion: "This grace, amongst others, has been bestowed on me by the Lord, that I would as willingly obey a novice who had entered the Order only to-day, as one who came first and had grown old in Religion. For a subject should consider his Prelate not as a man but as God, for the love of Whom he made himself subject." Afterwards he said: "There is no Prelate in all the world so feared by his subjects, as God could make me, if I would, be feared by my friars, but this grace the Lord has given me, that I am content with all as befits a minor in Religion."

We who were with him and have seen these things can testify that when certain friars did not satisfy his needs, or spoke words to him at which a man usually takes offence, he would instantly betake himself to prayer, and when he returned seemed to have forgotten the injury; nor did he ever say, "Such a one has not satisfied me," or "Such a one spoke injurious words to me." In this manner he persevered in virtue, and the nearer he approached to death the more earnestly did he study how he could live and die in perfect humility, poverty, and in the perfection of every virtue.

Digitized by Google

How he taught the perfect way of obedience.

The most blessed Father said to his friars: "Dearest Brothers, obey at the first word of command, and do not wait to have it repeated, neither reply nor argue about it, for there is nothing impossible, and even if I commanded you to do that which seems beyond your strength, yet will power be given you to perform it."

How he spoke of perfect obedience under the figure of a Corpse.

Once in the presence of some of his companions he lamented: "There is scarcely a Religious in the world who perfectly obeys his Prelate." Then said some of his companions: "Tell us, Father, what is perfect obedience?" To which he answered, speaking of true and perfect obedience under the figure of a corpse, "Take a dead body and place it anywhere you please, it will not murmur at being moved, it will not change its position or cry out if you let it go. If you seat it on a throne it will not look up but down, and to clothe it in purple but makes it more pale. This is the type of perfect obedience, that asks not why he is moved, minds not where he is placed, nor insists upon being sent elsewhere. If he be

Digitized by Google

promoted to office he still keeps humble, and the more he is honoured the more he counts himself unworthy."

Obedience purely and simply enjoined and not asked for he called holy obedience. But he prized as the highest obedience, in which flesh and blood had no part, the deed of those who betake themselves to heathen lands either to convert souls to God or to endure Martyrdom; and to ask for this obedience, he held was a thing most acceptable to God.

How he considered it dangerous to exact obedience too lightly, and not to obey when told to do so.

The blessed Father thought it unwise too lightly to put a friar on his obedience, for the weapon to be used as a last resource should not be drawn at first. "The sword should not be used except in the last extremity." On the other hand, he said that he who did not obey on the first call of obedience had no respect either for God or man, so long as there was no reasonable cause for making delay. Nothing could be more true, for an arrogant command from a Superior is as a sword in the hand of a madman, while no case is more desperate than that of a Religious who neglects and despises obedience.

Digitized by Google

In what manner he replied to those friars who tried to persuade him to apply for the privilege of preaching freely.

Certain friars said to Blessed Francis: "Father, do you not see how the Bishops at times refuse to let us preach, so that in some places we have to remain idle for many days before we are allowed to announce the word of God? It would be better to obtain from the Lord Pope a privilege in this matter, as it would be for the good of souls."

To this he answered with severe reproof: "You Friars-Minor do not know the will of God, and you do not allow me to convert the whole world as God wishes, since I desire, in the first place, to convert the Bishops; who, seeing our life and holy and humble reverence, will themselves call you to preach and convert the people; which will avail more than your privilege that would only lead you to pride. If they see you are free from all covetousness, and induce the people to render their dues to the Churches, they will ask you to hear the confessions of their people, though to this you should be indifferent, for if people are converted they will have no difficulty in finding Confessors. As for myself, the privilege I would have from the Lord is not to receive any privilege from men save that of

Digitized by Google

reverence for all, and by obedience to the holy Rule to convert the universal world more by example than by words."

How at that time the friars were reconciled when they had offended each other.

Blessed Francis affirmed that the Friars-Minor were sent in these last times by the Lord to show to those who were involved in the darkness of sin examples of a perfect life. And he would say that he was, as it were, filled with the odours of sweet perfume, and anointed with the unction of precious ointment, whenever he heard of the wonderful deeds of holy friars who were dispersed throughout the world.

It chanced that a certain friar made use of injurious words to another friar in the presence of a nobleman of the Island of Cyprus. When he saw that this other friar was troubled thereby, the offender was seized with a strong desire to punish himself, and picking up the dung of an ass he ground it between his teeth, saying: "Let the tongue that turned the poison of its anger on my Brother eat dung!" When the nobleman saw him do this he was struck with surprise, and so greatly edified that henceforth he placed himself and his at the disposal of the friars. This, then, became the custom of the friars, that if any one of them had hurt another by injurious

Digitized by Google

words or any other offence, he would humbly prostrate himself on the ground and kiss the foot of the offended friar. The blessed Father exulted whenever he heard of such holy examples amongst his friars, and called down blessings upon them as worthy of every grace, who, by word and example, reclaimed sinners to the love of Christ, since he ever desired that the zeal for souls with which he was filled should be shown forth by the likeness of his sons to himself.

How Christ complained to Brother Leo, the companion of Blessed Francis, of the ingratitude and pride of the friars.

One day our Lord Jesus Christ said to Brother Leo, the companion of Blessed Francis: "Brother Leo, I lament over the friars." Brother Leo replied: "For what reason, Lord?" The Lord made answer: "For three reasons: first, because they do not recognise My benefits which I have so lavishly and abundantly distributed to them, as thou knowest, though they neither sow nor do they reap; secondly, because they spend their time in murmuring and idleness; thirdly, because they provoke each other to anger, not returning to charity, nor do they forgive the injuries done them."

Digitized by Google

Of the humble and worthy answer he made to a Doctor of the Order of Preachers, who questioned him on a saying in Scripture.

When he was living near Siena there came to him a Doctor of Sacred Theology in the Order of Preachers, a truly humble and spiritual man. When he had discoursed for some time with Blessed Francis on the things of God, the Master questioned him on these words of Ezechiel: *If when I say to the wicked thou shalt surely die, thou declare it not to him, nor speak to him that he may be converted from his wicked way and live, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but I will require his blood at thy hand.* He said to him: "I know many, good Father, who are living in mortal sin, to whom I do not speak, warning them of their impiety. Will their souls be demanded from me?" To this Blessed Francis answered humbly that he was an ignorant man whom it would better become to be taught by him on a question of theology. On this the humble Master replied: "Brother, although I have heard wise men expound these words, yet would I like to hear what you understand of this." Then Blessed Francis said to him: "If the verse is to be understood in a general sense, then I take it to mean that the servant of God should shine forth so resplendently by the holiness of his life, that the light of his example and

Digitized by Google

conversation should be a rebuke to the wicked. In this way the brightness of his light and the odour of his good name will act as a warning to the wicked." When the Doctor, greatly edified, left, he said to the companions of Blessed Francis: "My Brothers, the theology of this man, having its root in purity and contemplation, flies upwards like an eagle, while our learning crawls over the earth on its belly."

Of the humility and concord they should observe with the clergy.

Blessed Francis desired his sons to keep peace with every one, ever showing themselves to the world as little and lowly, but above all he ever taught them by word and example to behave with the greatest humility towards the clergy. Hence he would say: "We are sent to aid the clergy for the salvation of souls, and to supply in ourselves what is wanting in them. Each one receives his reward, not according to his authority, but according to his work. Know, Brothers, that the gaining of souls to salvation is most acceptable to God, and this we can do better by living in peace and not in discord with the clergy. If these should place an obstacle in the way of the people's salvation, God will be their judge, and will repay them, but be ye subject to the Prelates and see that it be not

Digitized by Google

your fault if any jealousy arise. If you are the children of peace you will gain over both the clergy and people, and this will be more acceptable to God than if the people only were gained and the clergy scandalised. Conceal their faults and supply their defects, and when you have done this be all the more humble yourselves."

How he humbly obtained the Church of St. Mary of the Angels from the Abbot of St. Benedict at Assisi, and desired the friars should in all lowliness remain there.

When Blessed Francis saw it was God's will to increase the number of friars, he said to them: "Dearest Brothers, my little children, I see that the Lord will multiply us, and it seems to me good and conformable to religion to entreat the Bishop, or the Canons of St. Rufinus, or the Abbot of St. Benedict, to bestow on us a church, where the friars can recite the Hours, and, close to it, a small and poor little house built of wood and clay, where they can refresh themselves and labour, seeing that this place is neither convenient nor large enough for the friars whom God intends to increase, especially in that it has no church where the friars can say the Office; and should a friar depart this life, it is not fitting to bury him here, or in a church belonging to the secular

Digitized by Google

clergy." And this speech was pleasing to all the friars. He went, therefore, to the Bishop of Assisi and proposed this to him. The Bishop answered, "My Brother, I have no such church I could give you." And the Canons of St. Rufinus gave the like answer. Whereupon he repaired to the Abbot of St. Benedict at Mount Subasio, and made the same request to him. The abbot, moved by piety, having taken counsel with his monks, inspired by grace and the Divine Will, bestowed on Blessed Francis and his friars the Church of St. Mary of the Portiuncula, it being the poorest and smallest church they had. The abbot said to Blessed Francis: "Behold, Brother, I grant your prayer; but if the Lord sees fit to increase your Order, I wish this place to be the head and chief foundation of all." These words were pleasing to Blessed Francis and all his friars, and Blessed Francis felt the greater joy at this place being given to the friars, because the church bore the name of the Mother of Christ, because the church was so small, and also because it was called Portiuncula, "the little portion," thus truly expressing it to be the foundation and mother of the poor Friars-Minor. It was called Portiuncula, as in olden times the court thereof was named "The little Portion." Therefore Blessed Francis said: "For this reason it was the Lord's will that no other church should

Digitized by Google

be given to the friars, and that the first friars should not erect a new church, but should have only this, since herein is fulfilled a prophecy by the coming of the Friars-Minor." And although it was so poor, and nearly the whole of it in ruins, nevertheless for a long time the people of Assisi and that territory had a great devotion towards this church, and this devotion became greater and grows daily.

No sooner did the friars take up their dwelling there than God wonderfully increased their number, and the savour of their good fame was marvellously diffused through the valley of Spoleto, and thence through many parts of the world. In the olden days it had been called St. Mary of the Angels, because it was said the singing of angels was often heard therein.

Although the abbot and monks had freely and generously given the place to Blessed Francis and his friars, nevertheless Blessed Francis, like a good and prudent master desiring to build his house—that is, the Order—upon the unshakeable rock of the greatest poverty, sent every year a vessel full of little fishes, called loaches, in token of humility and poverty, to show that the friars should not possess any property, nor dwell on any unless it belonged to another, and that they should not have the power of ceding it for any reason whatsoever

Digitized by Google

When the friars brought this yearly offering of little fishes, the monks, out of regard for the humility of Blessed Francis, gave them a vessel filled with oil. Now we who were with Blessed Francis bear testimony of what he said of this church, pledging thereto his word, that it had been revealed to him that, by virtue of the many prerogatives the Lord had extended to this place, it was, amongst all the churches in the world, the one most dear to the Blessed Virgin, and the one for which she had the greatest affection. Hence he cherished for it the highest veneration and devotion, and that the friars might always hold this in enduring remembrance he caused it to be written in his Testament that the friars should do the same. Therefore, when he was near death, he said, in the presence of the Minister-General and other friars: "I desire to ordain and leave by will to the friars the place of St. Mary of the Portiuncula, that it may be held by them in the highest reverence and devotion."

And this, indeed, was observed by our ancient friars, and because this place was so holy and so beloved of Christ and the most glorious Virgin, they guarded its sanctity by continual silence and prayer both day and night. And this silence was broken only when, with great gravity and devotion, they spoke for the praise of God and the salvation of souls. If it chanced

Digitized by Google

that any idle or useless words were uttered, though this seldom happened, the speaker was at once reproved by another friar. In addition, they mortified the flesh with much fasting, in cold and nakedness, and by manual labour. Often, too, to avoid all sloth, they would help poor men with their field work, and in that manner receive their bread for the love of God. By these and other holy actions they preserved the sanctity of the place and of themselves. But in consequence of the many friars and seculars who frequent this place more than they used to do, even these friars have become more tepid in prayer and heroic actions, and more relaxed in perfection, going to the length of entering into idle conversation and listening to worldly news such as was not their wont, so that this place is not now held in the same reverence and devotion as it used to be, and as Blessed Francis and the first friars desired it should be.

When Blessed Francis had spoken these words with great fervour, he concluded: "I ordain, therefore, that this place shall depend immediately upon the Minister-General, who is to show the greatest care and solicitude to provide it with a good and holy family. Let the priests be chosen from amongst the best and most holy friars in the whole Order, and of those who know most perfectly how to

Digitized by Google

recite the Divine Office, to edify not only the seculars, but all the other friars who resort hither. In the same way the lay brothers chosen must be exceptionally saintly men, discreet, humble, and decorous. Above all, I desire that no other person and no other friar shall enter this place except the Minister-General and those who attend him. Nor shall they speak to any one, except the friars who serve them, and with the minister when he comes to visit them. It is likewise my wish that the lay brothers shall not speak to them idle words or worldly gossip, nor of any matter which is not for the good of their souls. I ordain most specially that no other persons be admitted into this place, the better to preserve its purity and sanctity, and that nothing shall be said or done therein except it be useful, but that this place be kept pure and holy with hymns and praises to the Lord. And when any of the friars pass from this life to God in this place, I decree that the Minister-General shall carefully seek for some other friar to replace him. And should it chance that in time to come other friars should be less observant of purity and holiness, I desire that this place may remain blessed and spotless for the good example of all the Religion, and, as it were, a candlestick bearing a bright and ever-shining light before the throne of

Digitized by Google

God and the Blessed Virgin. And may the Lord deign to be merciful to the defects and faults of all the friars, and take under His protection this Order, which is of His own planting."

Of the humble reverence he showed in the sweeping of churches and keeping them clean.

During a time when he was at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, and the number of friars was still small, Blessed Francis went round the villages and churches in the lordship of Assisi preaching the Gospel and exhorting all men to penance, and he would carry with him a broom to sweep out the churches, for it caused him great pain when he saw any church not as clean as he thought it should be. Therefore, whenever he finished his preaching he would invite the clergy into some place apart where he could not be overheard by the laity, and would speak to them on the salvation of their souls, and particularly exhort them to be solicitous in keeping the churches clean, as well as the altars and all things belonging to the celebration of the Divine Mysteries.

Of the peasant who found him sweeping the church, and, being converted, entered the Order and became a saintly friar.

One day as he was in the church of a village near the city of Assisi, humbly engaged in

Digitized by Google

sweeping and cleaning it, the report of his fame spread through the village, and many people came gladly to see and hear him. Amongst these a peasant of great simplicity called John, who was ploughing his field, also went to him, and finding him sweeping the church so humbly and devoutly said to him: "Brother, give me the broom, for I wish to help you;" and taking the broom out of his hand he finished the sweeping. When they were sat down together this man said to Blessed Francis, "Brother, I have long desired to serve God, especially since I have heard of you and your friars, but knew no way of getting to you; but now that, thanks be to God, I have met you, I will do all I can to please you." Blessed Francis, considering his fervour, exulted in the Lord, for at that time he had few friars, and this man's purity and simplicity promised that he would become a good Religious. Therefore he said to him: "Brother, if you wish to be of our life and company you must strip yourself of all goods, even those you may now possess without offence, and give them to the poor according to the counsels of the Holy Gospel, for this has been done by all my friars as far as it lay in their power." When the peasant heard this he returned to the field where he had left his oxen and plough, and unharnessing one of the oxen, brought it to Blessed Francis, saying: "Brother, I have served my

Digitized by Google

father and all my house many years, and as for this there is a debt owing to me, I will take this ox as my portion and give it to the poor as seems best to you." But when his relations and brothers, who were still very young, heard he was going to leave them, all his kinsfolk wept so bitterly and with loud lamentations that Blessed Francis was moved to pity, for it was a large and helpless family. Therefore Blessed Francis said to them: "Prepare dinner for us, and we will all eat together, and cease to lament, for I will tell you something to make you joyful." And at once they made ready a meal, and all ate of it with much gladness. When they had eaten Blessed Francis said: "This your son wishes to serve God, and instead of opposing him you should be glad thereat. For not only in the sight of God, but in that of the world, it is counted a great honour and advantage, both for soul and body, when one of your flesh and blood devotes himself to the Lord; and all our friars will be your sons and brothers. And since he is a creature of God, and desires to serve his Creator, to serve Whom is to reign, I cannot restore him to you; but to comfort you I do not wish him to despoil you of this ox, but that he should give it you as to the poor, though according to the Holy Gospel it should be given to the other poor." Then all present were comforted by the words of Blessed Francis, and rejoiced

Digitized by Google

over the restitution of the ox, for indeed they were in great poverty. And because Blessed Francis valued frankness and simplicity above all things, both in himself and others, he clothed him in the Habit of Religion, and chose him with great humility to be his companion. And so great was this man's simplicity that he thought himself bound to do all things he saw Blessed Francis do. Thus when Blessed Francis went into a church or any other place to pray, he would imitate him in every act and gesture. If Blessed Francis knelt, or lifted his hands to Heaven, or sighed or cleared his throat, he would do exactly the same. When Blessed Francis noticed these things, he, being much amused, reproved him for such simplicity, to which his companion replied: "Brother, I promised to do all that you do, therefore it seemed to me right to conform myself in all things to you."

This purity of intention and simplicity gave great consolation and pleasure to Blessed Francis. He afterwards made such progress in perfection that Blessed Francis and the other friars greatly admired his sanctity; and, not long after, he died in a state of grace. Whenever Blessed Francis, with much cheerfulness, told the friars the story of his conversion, he called him not Brother but Saint John.

Digitized by Google

How he ate from the same bowl with a leper for having shamed him.

When Blessed Francis returned to St. Mary of the Portiuncula he found there Brother James the Simple with a certain leper who was covered with sores. Now Blessed Francis had given him charge of this and other lepers, since he acted, as it were, as their physician, and willingly cleansed their sores, for at that time the friars attended the Leper Hospital. Nevertheless, Blessed Francis said, somewhat reproachfully, to Brother James: "You should not take these Christians abroad, since it is fitting neither for you nor for them." For although he had desired him to serve them, he did not wish they should be taken beyond the hospital, since they were greatly afflicted, and men held them in abhorrence, and this Brother James, out of sheer simplicity, would let the lepers accompany him from the hospital to St. Mary of the Angels as if they were his fellow-friars. St. Francis himself always called the lepers Brother Christians. As soon as he had spoken these words Blessed Francis reproached himself, believing that the leper would be offended and shamed because of what he had said to Brother James. And desiring to make reparation to God and the leper, he confessed his fault to Brother Peter Cataneo, saying: "Will you confirm the penance

Digitized by Google

I desire to perform for this fault, and not to oppose it?" Who answered: "Brother, do as you please." For Brother Peter held him in such reverence and fear that he never presumed to contradict him, though it often caused him much grief. Then said Blessed Francis: "This is my penance, that I eat out of the same bowl with the Brother Christian." When they were seated at table, Blessed Francis with the leper and all the other friars, one bowl was placed for Blessed Francis and the leper who was covered with running sores, especially the hand he dipped into the bowl to take out the pieces of meat. Seeing this, Brother Peter and the other friars were greatly troubled, but dared not remonstrate because of the fear and reverence they had for the holy Father. And he who saw it writes this in testimony.

How he put the demons to flight by humble words.

One time Blessed Francis went to the church of St. Peter of Bovara, near the village of Trevi, in the valley of Spoleto, and with him went Brother Pacificus, who in the world had been called the King of Verse, the noble and courteous Doctor of Song. This church was deserted, and Blessed Francis said to Blessed Pacificus, "Do you return to the Leper Hospital, as this night I wish to remain here alone, and

Digitized by Google

early in the morning come back to me." And so he remained alone, and, having said Complin and other prayers, he desired to rest and sleep, but could not. And his soul began to fear and to feel diabolical suggestions, and going out of the church, making the sign of the cross, he said: "On the part of God Almighty I command you, O demons, to do to my body all the Lord Jesus Christ permits you to do. And since I have no more inveterate enemy than this body of mine, avenge me on this my adversary and worst enemy." Instantly the temptation ceased, and going back to the place he had left, he slept peacefully.

The vision of Brother Pacificus, wherein he saw and heard that the throne of Lucifer was reserved for the humble Francis.

In the morning Brother Pacificus returned to him. Blessed Francis was standing before the altar in prayer, and Brother Pacificus remained outside the choir, also praying before the crucifix. And while he was absorbed in prayer he was lifted up in spirit and rapt into heaven, *whether in the body or out of the body God alone knoweth;* and he saw in heaven very many seats, and one amongst them was raised above the others, glorious to behold, adorned with splendour and many precious stones, so that he

Digitized by Google

marvelled at its great beauty, and wondered whose seat this could be. And he heard a voice that said: "This was the seat of Lucifer, and in his place will be seated the humble Francis."

When he had returned to his senses St. Francis suddenly came out to him, whereupon this friar fell at his feet, and stretching out his arms in the form of a cross, as if he already saw him on that throne in heaven, cried, "Father, grant me your forgiveness, and pray God to have mercy on me and condone my sins." Taking his hand, Blessed Francis raised him up, knowing at once that he had seen some mysterious vision during his prayer, for he spoke to Blessed Francis not as if he were still in the body, but as if he were already an inhabitant of heaven. Afterwards, as he did not like to speak of it directly to Blessed Francis, he hinted at it, as it were, and while talking of other things, said, "What do you believe of yourself, Brother?" To which Blessed Francis answered, "It seems to me I am a greater sinner than any one else in the world." At this instant Brother Pacificus heard an inner voice say: "By this may you know the truth of the vision revealed to you, since Lucifer for his pride was hurled from his seat, while Francis by his humility has merited to be exalted and gloriously enthroned!"

Digitized by Google

How he caused himself to be stripped and dragged with a rope round his neck before the people.

Having at a time suffered greatly from one of his serious attacks of illness, when he felt a little better he began to think that during his sickness he had exceeded his usual allowance of food, whereas he had really eaten very little. Though not quite recovered from the ague, he caused the people of Assisi to be called together in the public square to listen to the sermon. When he had finished preaching he told the people to remain where they were until he came back to them, and entered the Cathedral of St. Rufinus with many friars and Brother Peter Cataneo, who had been a Canon of that church, and was now the first Minister-General appointed by Blessed Francis, who spoke to the said Brother Peter, enjoining him under obedience not to contradict what he was about to say to him. Brother Peter replied: "Brother, it is neither possible, as between you and me, nor do I wish to do anything save what is pleasing to you." Then, taking off his tunic, Blessed Francis bade him place a rope round his neck and drag him thus before the people to the place where he had preached. At the same time he ordered another friar to carry a bowlful of ashes to the said place, and when he got there to throw the ashes into his

Digitized by Google

face. But this order was not obeyed by the friar out of the pity and compassion he felt for him.

Brother Peter, taking the rope, did as he had been told, but he and all the other friars shed tears of compassion and bitterness. When he stood thus denuded before the people in the place where he had preached, he cried: "You, and all those who by my example have been induced to abandon the world and enter Religion to lead the lives of friars, I confess before God and you that in my illness I have eaten flesh meat and broths made of meat." And all those people could not forbear weeping, especially as at that time it was very cold and he had scarcely recovered from the ague fever. Beating their breasts where they stood, they exclaimed, "If this Saint, for just and manifest necessity, with shame of body thus accuses himself, whose life we know to be holy, and who has imposed on himself such great abstinence and austerity since his first conversion to Christ, Whom we here, as it were, see in the flesh, what will become of us sinners who all our lifetime seek to follow our carnal appetites?"

How he wished every one should know what comforts he gave himself.

Another time, being at a certain hermitage during the Lent of St. Martin, and oil, in con-

Digitized by Google

sequence of his maladies, not being wholesome for him, he had some cakes mixed with lard. When the Lent was over, preaching before a great crowd of people, he began his sermon by saying: "You have come with great devotion to hear me, believing me to be a saintly man, but I here confess to God and you that during this Lent I have eaten cakes made with lard." Thus also, when he had been eating with seculars, or when, because of his ill-health, the friars had prepared for him some better food, he would in the house and outside, before the friars who did not know of it, and before seculars, make it known, saying, "I have eaten such or such things." Nor did he ever desire to hide from men that which was known to God. For this reason wherever he was, or in whatsoever presence, whether of Religious or laymen, if he felt in any way uplifted by pride and vainglory, or any other imperfection, he would at once openly confess it without excuse. He said at one time to his companions: "I desire to live in such wise, whether in desert or any other places, as if I were exposed to the sight of all men. For if they think me a holy man and I lead not a holy life, I should be a hypocrite." When he was suffering from chill on the stomach and a malady of the spleen, one of his companions, who was the Guardian, desired to sew a piece of fox fur inside his tunic for

Digitized by Google

the sake of warmth, as it was very cold, to whom Blessed Francis said: "If you wish me to wear fox fur inside the tunic, sew also a piece of the same fur on the outside, so that all men may know I wear fox fur inside." And as he wished so was it done, though he wore it only a short time, despite its being necessary for him.

How he accused himself of vainglory when giving alms.

As he was taking his way through the city of Assisi a poor old woman begged of him an alms for the love of God, and he at once gave her the mantle he had on his back, but no sooner had he done so than he confessed to those who followed him that he had committed the sin of vainglory. Such and many like examples could we who were with him give of his exalted humility, though neither words nor writing could express them. It was ever the constant and singular study of Blessed Francis not to appear as a hypocrite in the sight of God, and though on account of his bad health it was often necessary to increase his allowance of food, yet did he ever aim in all things to set a good example to the friars and others, and to this end would he patiently endure privation that he might not give occasion for murmuring to others.

Digitized by Google

How he described the state of perfect humility in himself.

When the time came near for holding the Chapter Blessed Francis said to his companion: "It does not seem to me that I am a Friar-Minor entirely and in all things unless I be in the state I will describe to you. Behold, the friars with much devotion invite me to the Chapter, and moved by their devotion I go to the Chapter with them. When they are there assembled they beg me to announce the Word of God and preach to them. And rising up I preach to them according to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Then, when the sermon is ended, suppose they all cry out against me, 'We do not want you to rule over us, you are not eloquent as is fitting you should be; you are too simple and ignorant, and it is a shame for us to have so simple and despicable a Prelate over us, therefore no longer presume to arrogate to yourself the title of our Prelate;' and they turn me out in disgrace and with indignation. It appears to me I should not be a Friar-Minor if I did not rejoice when they vilify me and eject me in disgrace, not wishing me to be their Prelate, as much as when they reverence and honour me. For if I rejoice when they reverence and honour me for their own profit and advantage, in which perchance there

Digitized by Google

is danger for my soul, should I not equally rejoice when they vilify me, in which there is certain gain for my soul?"

How he desired humbly to go to distant lands in the same manner as he had sent other friars, and how he taught the friars to go humbly and devoutly through the world.

When the Chapter was over whence many friars had been sent to provinces beyond sea, Blessed Francis said to the friars who remained: "Dearest Brothers, as it is my duty to be a model and example for all the friars, since I have sent friars into distant provinces to undergo labours and humiliations, hunger, thirst, and other hardships, it is but just and demanded by holy humility that I too should betake myself to some distant province, so that the friars may better bear adversity when they know I have to bear the same. Pray, therefore, that the Lord may show me what province to choose for His greater praise, the salvation of souls, and the good example to our Religious." For the most blessed Father was wont, whenever he desired to go to another province, first to pray and ask the friars to pray that the Lord would show him what place would be most pleasing to Him.

Thereupon the friars betook themselves to

Digitized by Google

prayer, and the prayers finished, they returned to him. And immediately, full of gladness, he said to them: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the glorious Virgin Mary, His mother, I choose the Province of France, where there is a Catholic people who, more than other Catholics, greatly reverence the Body of Christ, which is to me a great joy, and therefore do I desire to converse with them." For Blessed Francis had the highest reverence and devotion for the Body of Christ, and wished to have it inserted in the Rule that the friars in every province where they dwelt should show great care and solicitude in this matter, exhorting all clerics and priests that they should reserve the Body of Christ in good and decent places, and if they neglected this the friars were to do so for them. He also desired to insert in the Rule that when the friars found the Name of the Lord, and those words that made the Body of the Lord, not well and safely taken care of, the friars should collect them and put them to be kept in a decent place, paying honour to the Lord in His words. And although these things were not written in the Rule, the ministers not thinking it suitable the friars should be commanded to do this, in his Testament and other writings he left to the friars his will on this subject. At one time, indeed, he thought of sending some friars into every province, taking

Digitized by Google

with them a number of beautiful and clean pyxes, and whenever they found the Body of the Lord disrespectfully reserved they were to place it in the pyx with great honour and respect. In addition, he wished to send other friars into all the provinces with good moulds of iron to make the hosts beautiful and white.

When Blessed Francis had chosen the friars he desired to take with him, he said to them: "In the name of the Lord go two and two along the road, humbly and decorously keeping strict silence from Matins until Terce, praying to God in your hearts and not indulging in vain and idle words. Although you walk abroad let your conversation be as humble and discreet as if you were in a hermitage or in a cell. Wherever we are we carry with us our cell, for Brother body is our cell and the soul the hermit that dwells therein, praying to God and meditating on Him. If the soul cannot keep quiet and recollected in her cell, there is little use for a cell built by hands."

When he arrived at Florence he found there Hugo, Bishop of Ostia, who afterwards became Pope Gregory, who, when he heard of the intention of Blessed Francis to go into France, forbade him to go thither, saying: "Brother, it is not my will that you should go beyond the mountains, for there are many Prelates who would be pleased to oppose your Order at the Roman Court. But I and other Cardinals who

Digitized by Google

love your Order will protect and help it if you will remain within these provinces." Blessed Francis replied: "My lord, it would ill become me if, after sending my friars to distant provinces, I remain in these provinces, taking no share in the trials and tribulations which they support for the love of God." The Bishop then said to him, as if in reproach, "Why have you sent your friars into such remote parts to die of famine and suffer other tribulations?" Then Blessed Francis, filled with great fervour and the spirit of prophecy, made answer: "My lord, do you imagine that God has sent the friars for only a few provinces? Verily, I tell you that God has elected and called the friars for the advantage and salvation of all men throughout the world; not only in the lands of the faithful, but also in the lands of the infidel, they shall receive and gain many souls."

The Lord Bishop of Ostia moved to admiration at these words, acknowledged their truth; but as he would not allow him to go into France, Blessed Francis sent Brother Pacificus with many other friars. He himself returned to the valley of Spoleto.

How he instructed some friars to gain the souls of certain robbers by humility and charity.

To a certain hermitage of the friars near Borgo San Sepolcro, begging for bread came

Digitized by Google

some robbers, who laid in wait in the woods for passing travellers, to despoil them. Some of the friars maintained it was not fitting to give them alms, while others out of pity relieved them, hoping thus to move them to repentance. Meanwhile Blessed Francis came to that place, whom the friars asked if it were right to give them alms, and Blessed Francis answered: "If you will do as I tell you, confiding in God, you shall gain their souls. Go, therefore, and take with you good bread and good wine to the woods where they dwell, and calling to them say, 'Brother robbers, come to us who are your brothers, and bring you good bread and good wine.' When they come, spread a white cloth on the ground and place thereon the bread and wine, and serve them humbly and cheerfully while they eat. When they have eaten, speak to them the Word of God, and, at the end, beg them for the love of God, as your first petition, that they will promise you not to kill or wound any one. If you ask too much of them at first they will not listen to you, but this much for the sake of your humility and charity they will promise you. Then another day, because of their good promise, take with the bread and wine eggs and cheese, and serve them as before while they eat. And when they have eaten say to them, 'Why do you stay here to die of hunger and suffer so many hardships in order to do evil

Digitized by Google

in will and deed, for which you will lose your souls unless you are converted to the Lord? Better is it to serve the Lord Who in this world will give you all you need for your bodies and finally save your souls.' Then, inspired by the Lord, they will be converted because of the humility and patience you have shown them."

The friars did all that Blessed Francis had told them, and these robbers, by the grace and mercy of God, listened to them, and observed literally and in every point all things the friars had humbly begged of them. And further, because of the humility and kindness of the friars, they humbly served the friars, carrying wood for them to the hermitage, and some amongst them entered the Order. Others, confessing their sins with true repentance, made a promise into the hands of the friars to live thenceforth by the labour of their hands and never more commit the like offences.

How on being beaten by demons he knew it was more pleasing to God that he should stay in poor and humble places than with Cardinals.

One time Blessed Francis went to Rome to visit my Lord of Ostia, and after remaining with him some days went thence to visit the Lord Cardinal Leo, who was greatly devoted to Blessed Francis. And as it was winter time and the

Digitized by Google

roads were unfit for travelling, because of the cold and wind and rain, he begged him to remain a few days, as a poor man amongst the other poor he entertained daily at his table. This he said knowing that Blessed Francis ever wished to be received and treated as a poor man, although the Lord Pope and the Cardinals desired with much reverence and devotion to receive him as a guest, for they venerated him as a Saint. And the Cardinal added, "I will give you a good retired house, where you can pray and eat as it pleases you."

Then Brother Angelo Tancredi, one of the first twelve friars, who was then living with this Cardinal, said to Blessed Francis: "Brother, there is close by a spacious tower and so retired you might well believe yourself in a hermitage." When Blessed Francis saw the place it pleased him, and returning to the Lord Cardinal he said: "My lord, perchance I will remain with you for a few days." Thereat was the Lord Cardinal pleased and glad. Then Brother Angelo went and prepared a place in the tower for Blessed Francis and his companion. And as Blessed Francis did not desire to come down from there while he remained with the Cardinal, nor that any one should come to him, Brother Angelo promised, and ordered that food should be brought there to him every day for himself and his companion. When Blessed Francis had gone

Digitized by Google

there with his companion, on the first night, when he tried to sleep, demons came and beat him soundly. And calling his companion he said to him: "Brother, demons have beaten me soundly; stay near me, for I fear to be alone." Therefore his companion remained near him all night, for Blessed Francis was trembling like a man in a fever, and they kept vigil all the night together.

Meanwhile Blessed Francis said to his companion, "Why have the demons beaten me, and why has the Lord given them power to hurt me?" Then he added: "The demons are the police of the Lord, and as the governor of a land sends his police to punish evildoers, so the Lord by His police, the demons who in this world are His ministers, corrects and chastises those He loves. Often even the perfect Religious does wrong in ignorance, and when he does not recognise his fault he is chastised by the devil, that he may diligently search and consider both within and outside himself in what he has offended. For in those who are truly loved of the Lord in this life He leaves nothing to be punished hereafter. By the mercy and grace of the Lord I am not conscious in myself of any offence that I have not confessed and made satisfaction for, yet by His grace the Lord has given me to know clearly when I please or displease Him. Therefore, it may be He has chas-

Digitized by Google

tised me by his police, because, though the Lord Cardinal has shown me compassion, and this refreshment is necessary for my body, my friars, who wander through the world, and other friars who live in hermitages and poor houses, when they hear I am staying with the Lord Cardinal, might have reason to murmur against me, saying, 'We have to support every adversity while he has his own consolations.' As I am ever bound to set them a good example, since for this reason I was given to them, it is more edifying to the friars when I dwell with them in poor places rather than elsewhere, and they are better able to bear their trials patiently when they know I have to bear the same."

This was ever the whole and constant study of our Father in all things to set a good example and never to give the other friars occasion to complain of him. Hence, whether he were ill or well, so many and great were his sufferings that those friars who knew this, such as we who were with him to the day of his death, cannot read or recall these things without shedding tears, and bearing all tribulation and want with greater patience and joy.

In the morning Blessed Francis came down from the tower, and going to the Lord Cardinal, told him all that had happened to him, and of the conversation between himself and his companion, finally adding: "Men repute me to be

Digitized by Google

a holy man and, behold, demons chase me from my retreat."

The Lord Cardinal was greatly diverted with him, but knowing and venerating him for a Saint would not contradict him nor compel him to stay. Then Blessed Francis bade him farewell, and returned to the Hermitage of San Colombano near Rieti.

How he reproved the friars who would go by the way of their learning and science, and not by the way of humility, and foretold the reformation of the Order, and return to its first state.

When Blessed Francis was at the General Chapter at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, called the Chapter of Mats, as there was no shelter save that given by mats of straw, at which were present more than five thousand friars, many learned friars came to the Lord Bishop of Ostia, who was there also, and said to him: "My Lord, we wish you would persuade Brother Francis to follow the advice of wiser friars, and allow himself to be guided by them." And they quoted the Rules of SS. Benedict, Augustine and Bernard, who gave such and such instructions as to the manner of living in Orders.

When the Cardinal repeated all these things to Blessed Francis by way of admonition, he answered never a word, but taking the Cardinal

Digitized by Google

by the hand led him into the midst of the friars assembled in Chapter, and, moved and inspired by the Holy Ghost, said: "My Brothers, my Brothers, the Lord has called me by the way of simplicity and lowliness, and has shown me this to be the true way for myself and those who believe and would follow me. Therefore I desire you should name to me no other Rule,—whether of St. Benedict, St. Augustine, or St. Bernard; nor any other way or fashion of living save that which the Lord in His mercy has shown and given to me. The Lord has said to me that He wills me to be a new Covenant in this world, and wills not to lead us by any other way, save by this knowledge. As for your science and learning, God will confound you, and I have confidence in the police of the Lord, by whom God will punish you and will bring you back to your former state whether you will or not."

Then the Cardinal, greatly awed, answered nothing, and the friars were filled with much fear.

How he divined and predicted that learning would bring about the ruin of the Order, and how he forbade one of his companions to give himself up to the study of preaching.

Blessed Francis greatly deplored those who, neglecting virtue, sought after vain knowledge, especially when they did not persevere in the

Digitized by Google

vocation to which they had been called from the beginning. Of these he said: "My friars who are led by vain knowlédge in the day of tribulation will find their hands empty. Therefore do I wish they should rather be strong in virtue, so that when the time of tribulation comes they may have the Lord with them in their trouble, for when tribulation has come upon them useless books will be thrown into the windows and dark corners."

This he did not because the study of Sacred Scripture was displeasing to him, but to withdraw them from superfluous craving for knowledge. He desired them rather to be good in charity than seekers after curious science.

Foreseeing that the time was at hand in which the learning that puffs up would cause the ruin of the Order, he, after his death, appeared to one of his companions who was intent on the study of preaching, to reprove and warn him that it were better he should study the way of humility and simplicity.

How in the time of coming tribulation the friars who entered the Order should be blessed, and having been proved would be better than their predecessors.

Blessed Francis said: "In the time that is coming, when by reason of the evil example of bad friars this Order, beloved of God, will

Digitized by Google

be defamed and ashamed to appear in public, those who in that day enter the Order will come led solely by the power of the Holy Ghost, and no soil of flesh and blood shall stain them, and they shall be truly blessed by the Lord. And though their works be not meritorious, because of the coldness of that charity which made the saints labour with the spirit of fervour, nevertheless, great temptations coming upon them, they who in that time have been proved shall be better than their predecessors. But woe to those who, having only a deceptive appearance of being Religious, glorying in their wisdom and confiding in their learning, shall be found slothful, not exercising themselves in good works, in the way of the Cross and penance, nor in pure Gospel observance, which, by their profession, they are bound to observe wholly and simply! These will not resist with constancy the temptations sent to prove the elect, but those who are proved and approved shall receive the crown of life, for which the malice of the reprobate has given them occasion to strive."

How he answered his companion who asked him why he did not correct the excesses which had appeared in the Order during his own time.

A certain companion of Blessed Francis once said to him, "Father, forgive me if I speak to

Digitized by Google

you on a matter many of us have considered," and added, "You well know how, formerly, by the Grace of God, the whole Order flourished in pure perfection; how the friars, with great fervour and solicitude in all things, observed holy Poverty, that is in small and poor buildings, and furnishing, in few and poor books and garments, and in these, as well as in all other exterior things, united in will and fervour, were anxious to observe everything belonging to our profession and vocation, for an example to all, and that they were all of one mind in the love of God and their neighbours, as truly Apostolic and Evangelical men. But now, for some time past, this purity and perfection have been exchanged for something very different, and many say and excuse the friars that, because of their great number, these things cannot be observed; indeed, many of the friars are so blinded as to assert that the people are more edified and led to perfection by the present than by the former things, and, therefore, it appears to them they live more becomingly, despising and setting at naught the way of holy simplicity and poverty, which was the beginning and foundation of our Order. Therefore, some of us considering these things, firmly believe they displease you, and wonder, if it be so, you allow them to go on and do not correct them." Then answered Blessed Francis, and said: "The Lord forgive you,

Digitized by Google

Brother, because you desire to be my adversary, and to mix me up in that which does not belong to my office. For, as long as I held the office of Prelate over the friars, while they maintained the practice of their vocation and profession, although from the beginning of my conversion I have been infirm, yet, as carefully as lay in my poor power, I tried to satisfy them by example and preaching; but afterwards, when the Lord increased the number of friars, and they, through tepidity and want of spirit, began to decline from the narrow way in which they should have walked, and took the broad road that leads to death, no longer attending to their vocation and profession and good example, and would not turn aside from the dangerous and death-dealing road for any preaching, admonition, or example of mine, which I continued to show them, I resigned the Prelacy and government of the Order to the Lord and ministers. And although, at the time when I renounced my office of Prelate, I excused myself to the friars at the General Chapter, that I did so because my many infirmities made me unfit to have charge of them, yet were the friars willing to act according to my desire, for their consolation and usefulness, they should have no other minister over them but myself till the day of my death. For the faithful and good subject who knows the will of his Prelate, and

Digitized by Google

observes it, gives him but little anxiety, and so greatly should I rejoice in the goodness of the friars, both for the gain to themselves and to me, that were I chained to a sick bed nothing should prevent my giving them satisfaction, the office of a Prelate being wholly spiritual—that is to overcome their vices, to correct and amend them spiritually. But, as I cannot correct and amend them by preaching, admonition, or example, I will not become their executioner, to punish and scourge them as if I were a worldly authority. Nevertheless, I trust in the Lord that the invisible enemies, who are His police, to punish in this world and in the next, will take vengeance on those who transgress the Commandments of God and the vow of their profession, and will cause them to be corrected by the men of this world with reproach and shame, that they may return to their vocation and profession. Nevertheless, until the day of my death, I will not cease by example and good works to teach the friars to walk in the way the Lord has shown me, that being taught and admonished by word and deed they may be without excuse before God, and I shall not be held responsible in the end to render an account of them before God."

Digitized by Google

INTERPOLATION.

THESE WORDS WERE WRITTEN BY BROTHER LEO, COMPANION AND CONFESSOR OF ST. FRANCIS, WHO SAID HE HAD THEM FROM THE MOUTH OF ST. FRANCIS, TO BROTHER CONRAD OF OFFIDA, WHEN THE SAID BROTHER CONRAD WAS AT ST. DAMIAN'S, NEAR THE CITY OF ASSISI.

St. Francis, standing in the apse of the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, lifted up his hands in prayer and besought Christ, with a loud voice, to have mercy on the people in the great tribulation which was about to fall upon them. And the Lord said: "Francis, if thou wouldst I should have mercy on the Christian people, have a care that My Order maintain the state in which I have placed it, for nothing else remains to Me in the whole world. And I promise that, for love of thee and thy Order, I will not permit the world to fall into tribulation. But this I say to thee, that if they decline from this way in which I have placed them, and provoke Me to wrath, I will rise up against them, and, calling the demons, will give them power to do as they will, and place scandal between them and the world, that none of thine shall have a dwelling-place except in the woods, and when the world loses faith in thy Order it will be because no

Digitized by Google

light remains in those I have placed to enlighten the world." And Blessed Francis said: "On what will my friars live who dwell in the woods?" Christ said: "I will feed them as I fed the Children of Israel in the desert with manna—that is those who are perfect, and return to the first state in which the Order was founded and begun."

That the prayers and tears of humble and simple friars convert the souls that seem to be converted by the learning and preaching of others.

The most blessed Father would not have his friars covetous of learning and books, but desired and admonished them to found themselves on holy humility, and follow pure simplicity, holy prayer and our Lady Poverty as the saintly first friars had done: which alone was the sure way to secure their own salvation, and the edification of others, since Christ, to Whose imitation they were called, did in this manner teach us by word and example.

The blessed Father looking into the future knew by the Holy Spirit, and would frequently say to the friars, that many friars by reason of the admiration of others shall forego their vocation, that is holy humility, pure simplicity, prayer, and devotion to the Lady Poverty, and it will happen to them that when they imagine themselves imbued with devotion, glowing with

Digitized by Google

love, and illumined with the knowledge of God because of their knowledge of Holy Scripture, will in the time of trial be found cold and empty, and will not find themselves able to live according to their vocation, having spent their time in vain and false studies, and he feared even that which they appeared to have will be taken from them, since they neglected their real and true vocation. Also he said: "There are many friars who place all their study and solicitude in acquiring knowledge, leaving aside their holy vocation, evading both in mind and body the way of humility and holy prayer, who when they preach to the people and learn that many have been edified and converted, are puffed up and boast of their works, taking the gains of another for their own, since their preaching has been rather to their own condemnation and prejudice, and they have in truth done no more than to act as the instruments of those by whom the Lord has really gathered in this harvest; and those whom they believe to have edified and converted by their preaching, the Lord has edified and converted by reason of the prayers and tears of holy, poor, humble and simple friars, who are generally ignorant of this since such is the Will of God, that they may not pride themselves upon it. These are the friars who are my Knights of the Round Table, and who, hidden away in desert and remote places in order the

Digitized by Google

better to give themselves to prayer and meditation, weep over their own sins and those of others, living in simple and humble conversation. Their holiness, known to God, is often ignored by the other friars and men, but when their souls are presented to the Lord by the Angels, the Lord will show them the fruits and reward of their strivings, that is the many souls saved by their example, prayers and tears, and will say to them, 'My beloved sons, such and such souls have been saved by your prayers, tears and example; *because you have been faithful over a few things I will place you over many things.* Others, it is true, have preached and worked out sermons of their own wisdom, yet it is to your merits I have given the fruits of salvation, therefore receive the reward of their labours and the fruit of your own merits, the Eternal Kingdom, which by your humility and simplicity, your prayers and tears, you have violently carried away.' Thus shall they *bring their sheaves with them,* the harvest and merit of their holy humility and simplicity, entering into the joy of the Lord with gladness and exultation. But they who cared only to know and show others the way of salvation, not walking therein themselves, shall stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, naked and empty, bearing nothing in their hands save the sheaves of shame and confusion. Then shall the truth

Digitized by Google

of holy humility and simplicity, of holy prayer and poverty, which is our vocation, be exalted and glorified and receive praise, which those inflated with the wind of science have detracted by their lives and the vain words of their own wisdom, saying truth was falsehood, and, as if struck with blindness, cruelly persecuted those who walked in Truth. Then the error and falsity of the opinion in which they walked, preaching it as Truth, and by which they precipitated many into the Pit of Darkness, shall end in sorrow, confusion, and shame, and they and their dark opinions shall be cast into exterior darkness to mingle with the Spirits of darkness."

Therefore the Blessed Francis commenting upon the words *The barren hath borne many: and she that had many children is weakened,* said: "The barren is the good Religious, simple, humble, poor and despised, lowly and abject, who by holy prayer and virtue continues to edify others, bringing forth with groans of suffering."

These words he often repeated before the ministers and other friars, especially in the General Chapter.

How he willed and taught that the Prelates and Preachers should exercise themselves in prayer and works of humility.

That faithful servant and perfect imitator of Christ, Francis, feeling himself by virtue of holy

Digitized by Google

humility powerfully transformed, as it were, into Christ, did above all desire to implant this virtue in his friars, and constantly, with great charity, incited them by word and example to love, desire, follow and persevere in this virtue, especially admonishing ministers and preachers to exercise themselves in works of humility. He also said the office of Prelates and the solicitude of preachers should not cause them to omit holy and devout prayer, questing for alms, manual labour, and the practice of all works done by the other friars, for the sake of good example and gain for their own souls, and those of others; for greatly are the subject friars edified when their ministers and preachers give themselves to prayer, and gladly practise works of humility and lowly service. Otherwise they cannot without shame and prejudice to themselves judge other friars, and reprove them for not doing these things. It is fitting they should follow the example of Christ before they teach it, teaching and practising it at the same time.

How, to shame himself, he taught the friars when he was the servant of God and when not.

One time Blessed Francis called together many friars and said to them, "I have prayed the Lord to show me when I am His servant and when not, since there is nothing else I desire save to

Digitized by Google

be His servant. And out of His great benignity the Lord answered me, 'Know thyself to be My true servant when thou thinkest, speakest, and doest holy works.' Hence have I called you together, Brothers, and told you this that I may be shamed whenever you see me deficient in any of these things or in all of them."

How he ever desired that all the friars should at times labour with their hands.

He said that the tepid who never earnestly and humbly applied themselves to some work would be vomited forth from the mouth of God, and no idler ever appeared before him whom he did not severely reprove. Therefore himself, as the example of every perfection, worked humbly with his hands, never permitting himself to waste the precious gift of time. He would say: "I desire that my friars should labour and practise and humbly exercise themselves in good works, so that we may not be a burden to men, and that the heart and tongue may not idly stray abroad, and that those who do not know how to work shall learn." He said the gain and wages of their work should not be left to the judgment of the worker, but should be committed to the Guardian or the family.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

OF HIS ZEAL FOR THE PERFECT OBSERVANCE OF THE RULE AND FOR ALL THE ORDER.

First, how he praised the observance of the Rule, and wished the friars to know it, and speak of it, and die with it.

THAT perfect and zealous lover of the observance of the Holy Gospel, Blessed Francis, strove with great fervour for the common perfection of our Rule, which is no other than a perfect observance of the Gospel, and blessed with a special benediction those who were its true promoters. For this, he would say to his followers, is the book of Life, hope of salvation, pledge of glory, the pith of the Gospel, the way of the Cross, the key of Paradise, the text of the Eternal Covenant. Hence he wished all to have and know this, and that in their conversation, to avoid weariness, the friars should discuss it, and, in memory of the vow they had taken, should argue it interiorly. Also he taught them to keep it ever before their eyes in commemoration and memory of the life it bound them to lead, and

Digitized by Google

their debt to regular observance, and, besides, he desired and taught that the friars should die with it.

Of a holy Lay Brother who was martyred holding the Rule in his hands.

Of this holy document and institution of the most blessed Father a certain saintly lay brother was not forgetful, who we most certainly believe to be amongst the martyrs, for, going amongst the infidels in his zeal for martyrdom, when he was led to death by the Saracens, clasping the Rule with great fervour in his hands and humbly bowing his knees, he said to his companion, "For all things I have done contrary to this Rule, dearest Brother, I confess myself guilty before the eyes of the Divine Majesty and yours."

This short confession was followed by the sword, which, ending his life, bestowed on him the crown of martyrdom. This Brother entered the Order in his early youth and could hardly support the fasts of the Rule; nevertheless this boy wore a mail shirt next to his skin. Happy youth who began so happily and so happily ended!

How he wished the Order to be ever under the protection and correction of the Roman Church.

Blessed Francis said, "I will go and recommend the Order of Friars-Minor to the Holy

Digitized by Google

Roman Church, whose potent rod terrifies and corrects evildoers, and allows the sons of God everywhere to grow and rejoice in full liberty to eternal salvation. May her sons ever recognise the benefits of this their sweet Mother, and follow with spiritual devotion in her venerable footsteps. No evil shall befall the Order under her protection, nor shall the son of Belial go through the vineyard of the Lord with impunity. This Mother will herself emulate the glory of our holy Poverty, and will not allow the fame of our humility to be clouded by pride, nor our glad obedience to be obscured. She will keep unbroken the bonds of charity and peace in us, and will strictly censure those that dissent from her; and in her sight the observance of Gospel purity will flourish daily, nor will she allow the odour of our good name and holy conversation to be poured forth in vain."

Of four privileges the Lord bestowed upon the Order and revealed to Blessed Francis.

Blessed Francis said he had obtained from the Lord these four privileges, which were announced to him by an Angel, namely: That the Order and profession of the Friars-Minor should last till the Day of Judgment. Also, that none who wilfully persecute the Order should live long. Also, that no evildoer who lived

Digitized by Google

wickedly in the Order should remain therein. Also, that whosoever truly loved the Order, even if he were a sinner, should at the last find mercy.

The qualifications he said were necessary in the Minister-General and his companions.

So fervent was his zeal for the preservation of perfection in the Order, and so exalted appeared to him the perfect observance of the Rule, that he often thought upon who should after his death be fitted to govern the whole Order and preserve its perfection, but could find none suitable. When near the end of his life a certain friar said to him: "Father, you will go to the Lord, and the family that follows you will remain in the Vale of Tears, will you then not let us know if there be one in the Order on whom your spirit may rest, and who will worthily bear the burden of Minister-General?" Blessed Francis answered, and his words were weighted with sighs: "The Leader of an army so great and numerous, the Shepherd of a flock so extensive and scattered abroad, my son, I can not as yet discern, but I will depict for you one in whom shall be clearly manifested what manner of man the Leader and Shepherd of this family should be. This man should be one of serious life, great discretion, of good fame, having no private affections, lest by

Digitized by Google

preferring some he give scandal to the rest of the Order. He must be given to the study of prayer, yet in such wise that whereas he gives to it certain hours for his own soul, he devotes the rest of the time to his flock; especially must he in the early morning prefer before everything the most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in which he must in lengthened devotion commend himself and his flock lovingly to the Divine protection. But after his prayers he must place himself at the disposal of all; answering all with charity, patience and sweetness; providing for all. He must not be an acceptor of persons, and must care no less for the simple and ignorant than for the learned and wise. If he possess the gift of knowledge, yet let his actions rather bear the marks of piety and simplicity, patience and humility; exciting virtue in himself and others, and preaching more by example than by words. Let him hold money in detestation, as the chief cause of corruption of our profession and perfection; and as the Leader and example whom all should imitate let him on no account multiply the means of getting money. Let his habit and book suffice for his own needs; and for that of the other friars his pencase with its pen, his tablets and seal. He should not be a collector of books nor give much time to reading, lest he take the time for study he should

Digitized by Google

give to the duties of his office. Let him compassionately console the afflicted since this is the last comfort of those in trouble, lest the remedies needful for health be wanting to the infirm, and the malady get the upper hand of the sick. Let him win the refractory by gentleness, humbling himself and remitting part of his authority to gain a soul. To those who have fled the Order let him extend the bowels of compassion; and, as sheep that are perishing, let him not deny them mercy, knowing how great must have been the temptations that drove them to so extreme a step, and that if the Lord had permitted him to be as greatly tried he might have fallen down a steeper precipice. I desire that to him as Christ's Vicar all devotion and reverence be paid, and that he be honoured by all and in all things, and that provision may be made, with goodwill, for all his wants, compatible with the lowliness of our state. Nevertheless, he must not incline to honours, nor take more complaisance in favours than in injuries; nor must he be changed except for the better by dignities. If at any time he should need better food, let him not take it in secret but in public, so that others may not feel ashamed to do the like in their ailments and weakness. He must be able in a special manner to direct the conscience and bring to light the hidden things of truth.

Digitized by Google

Let him at the beginning suspect all accusations until by diligent examination the truth be shown; let him give ear to no gossip, and be especially on his guard with tale-bearers and not easily believe them. Lastly, he must be one who will never on any account offend against the laws of justice and equity for the sake of keeping in Office; at the same time he shall beware of too great strictness, lest thereby a soul be killed; or of too great mildness, lest discipline be relaxed; but let him be feared by all in such wise that he may be loved as well as feared. Let him feel the office of Prelate to be more a burden than an honour.

"I desire also that he should have for his companions men of probity; austere towards themselves, strong under trials, pitiful and compassionate towards offenders, having an equal affection for all, taking nothing for their labour except to supply their corporal needs; and desiring nothing save the praise of God, the perfection of the Order, merit for their own souls, and for all the friars perfect salvation; affable and courteous towards them, receiving them with holy cheerfulness, and manifesting purely and simply in themselves the form and example of Evangelical Observance according to the profession of the Rule. Behold, thus should be the General of this Order, and such should be his companions."

Digitized by Google

What the Lord said to him when he was greatly afflicted because of the friars who declined from perfection.

According to the measure of the zeal he ever had for the perfection of the Order was his grief when he saw or heard of any imperfection therein; and when he came to realise that some of the friars set a bad example in the Order, and that the friars in general began to fall away from the height of their perfection, borne down by exceeding sadness of heart, he prayed to the Lord, saying: "Lord, I return to Thee this family Thou hast given me." At once the Lord answered him: "Tell me, O simple and foolish little man, why grievest Thou when any one leaves the Order, and when the friars walk not in the way I have pointed out to thee? Tell me, who has planted this Order of the friars? Who is it converts men to repentance; who gives strength to persevere therein? Is it not I? I did not place thee over my Family because thou wert a learned and eloquent man; since I do not desire that either thou or those who are true friars and observers of the Rule I have given thee should walk in the way of learning and eloquence. But I chose thee who art simple and ignorant because I intended that thou and all others should understand it is I who watch over my

Digitized by Google

flock; and have chosen as a sign that the works I do in thee, they also shall do in themselves. Therefore those who walk in the way I have shown thee have Me and shall possess Me still more abundantly; while those who will to walk by another road, from them shall be taken away that which they seemed to have. For this reason I tell thee not to disturb thyself so much about others, but do what thou hast to do, work what thou hast to work, because in perpetual charity have I planted the Order of the friars. Therefore know that for the love I bear them, if any friar returns to sin, dying outside the Order, I will send another into the Order who shall wear the crown in his place; and if he be not yet born I will cause him to be born. And that thou mayest know how cordially I love the life and Order of the friars, were it to happen that in all the Order there remained only three friars, it will still be my Order and I will not desert it for ever."

When he heard this his soul felt great consolation. And although, because of the zeal he ever had for the perfection of the Order, his heart could not help being pierced with grief when he heard of any imperfection amongst the friars, which would cause scandal and give bad example, after having thus been consoled by the Lord he recalled to mind the Psalm, saying: "*I have sworn and am determined to keep the*

Digitized by Google

judgments of Thy justice, and to observe the Rule the Lord gave me and all those who wish to follow me. And not I only but all the friars are bound to this, and since I gave up the government of the friars, because of my infirmities and for other reasonable causes, I am not answerable for anything save to pray for the Order, and set a good example to the friars; for this I have from the Lord and know in truth that, even if my infirmities had not excused me, I should give most aid to the Order by daily watching in prayer for it to the Lord that He may govern, preserve and protect it. For I have taken upon myself this obligation to the Lord and the friars, that if any of the friars should be lost by my bad example I am willing the Lord should hold me responsible in his stead." These words he would often repeat to quiet his heart, and would also often explain these words to the friars in his preaching and in the Chapters.

Hence if any friar said to him at any time that he should interfere in the Government of the Order he would answer, "The friars have their Rule and have vowed to observe it, and that they might have no excuse on my account, when it pleased the Lord to make me their Prelate, before them I also vowed to observe it in the same manner. Hence, as the friars know what they are bound to do and what to avoid, all that

Digitized by Google

remains for me is to teach them by my works, as for this I was given to them, during my life and after my death."

Of the singular zeal he had for the place of St. Mary of the Portiuncula, and the Constitutions he made against idle words there.

Above all the places of the Order he had a singular zeal for, and made it his study to preserve the perfection of life and conversation therein, was the sacred place of St. Mary of the Angels, as the head and mother of the whole Order; intending and desiring this place to be the model and example of humility, poverty, and all Evangelical perfection, and that the friars who dwell there should be beyond all the other friars circumspect; in all things acting according to, and avoiding everything that did not make for, the perfection of regular observance.

Hence at one time, to eradicate sloth, which is the root of all evil, especially in a Religious, he ordained that every day after they had eaten, himself and all the friars should occupy themselves with some work that they might not lose, wholly, or in part, what they had gained in prayer, by useless and idle words, to which men are most inclined after meals. He also ordained and ordered it to be strictly observed that any

Digitized by Google

friar who, either when doing nothing or at work with the others, uttered idle words, shall say one *Our Father*, praising God at the beginning and end of the prayer; and if conscious of his fault he accuse himself, he shall say the one *Our Father* and the *Praises of the Lord* for his own soul; but if the reproof came first from another friar he shall in the same manner say one *Our Father* for the soul of him who reproved him. If being deservedly reproved he makes excuse and will not say the *Our Father*, he shall be bound to say two *Our Fathers* for the soul of the friar who reproved him. And if, on reliable testimony, he is shown to have used idle words, he shall repeat the *Praises of the Lord* at the beginning and the end aloud so as to be heard and understood by the surrounding friars, and they that hear him shall listen in silence. If any friar hear another speak idle words and keep silence, not reproving him, the hearer shall in the same manner say one *Our Father* and the *Praises of the Lord* for the soul of him who spoke the idle words.

And every friar on entering a cell, or the house, or any other place where there is a friar or friars, should at once with devotion bless and praise God. The *Praises of the Lord* the most blessed Father always said himself, and with ardent desire taught and impressed upon the friars that they should carefully and devoutly say the same.

Digitized by Google

How he admonished the friars never to desert this place.

Although Blessed Francis knew that the Kingdom of Heaven is to be found in all parts of the earth, and believed the grace of God was everywhere bestowed on the elect; nevertheless, he proved by experience that the place of Blessed Mary of the Portiuncula was above all others enriched with grace and frequented by heavenly spirits. He would often say to the friars, "Take care, O sons, that you never leave this place. If they put you out on one side return by the other; for this place is holy, wherein dwell Christ and His Blessed Mother. Here, when we were but few, did the Most High increase our number; here the light of His wisdom illumines the souls of His poor ones; here the fire of his love enkindles our wills; here whosoever prays with a devout heart will obtain that which he asks; and the offender is seriously punished. Therefore, O sons, guard this place with the highest reverence and honour, for it is truly the dwelling-place of God, singularly loved by Him and His Mother, and here with all your hearts raise the voice of exultation and faith, confessing God the Father and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, united in the Holy Ghost."

Digitized by Google

Of the prerogatives given by the Lord in the place of St. Mary of the Angels.

Truly most holy is this place of places,
Worthy the greatest dignity and honour;
Happy its surname, happier still its own name,
And from its title presaging good omen.
Angels assembling here the night illumined,
After St. Francis raised it from its ruins,
One of the three the Father thus refounded.
Chosen by the Father to clothe men with the sackcloth,
Binding the body subject to the spirit,
Here in this temple was born the Minor Order,
Here flocked a crowd to follow his example.
Clare, Spouse of God, held here her heavenly nuptials,
Earth's pomps refusing to cling to Christ more closely.
Sacred the birthplace of Friars and Poor Ladies
Who back to Christ have brought our planets' dwellers.
Here the world's highway has been more nearly straitened,
Broadened virtue's path for a chosen people,
Here grew up the Rule, renewed was holy Poorness,
Glory laid prostrate, the Cross upraised in triumph,
Francis, when tempted and sorely tried in spirit,
Peace found, and quiet to his mind returning.
Here when doubts assailed him Truth was manifested.
Here all the Father prayed for will be granted.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

OF HIS ZEAL FOR THE PERFECTION OF THE FRIARS.

First, how he described to them the perfect friar.

THE most blessed Father transformed, as it were, into the holy friars, by the ardent love and fervent zeal he had for their perfection, often meditated within himself what were the conditions and virtues that should adorn a good Friar-Minor. He would say that a good friar was one who had the life and conditions of these holy friars, namely: the faith of Brother Bernard who possessed this in perfection, joining with it the love of poverty; the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo who was, indeed, of the most holy purity; the courtesy of Brother Angelo, who was the first knight to come into the Order, and was adorned with all courtesy and kindness; the gracious aspect and natural sense, with the beautiful and devout eloquence of Brother Masseo; the mind elevated in contemplation possessed by Brother Giles in the highest perfection; the virtues and continual good works of the holy Rufin, who prayed without ceasing,

Digitized by Google

and even when asleep, or whatsoever he might be doing, kept his mind fixed upon the Lord; the patience of Brother Juniper who attained to a state of perfect patience by always keeping in view the entire renunciation of his own will, and his ardent desire to follow Christ by the way of the Cross; the physical and spiritual vigour of Brother John of the Lauds, who at one time in bodily prowess surpassed all other men; the charity of Brother Roger, whose whole life and conversation were penetrated with fervent charity; the solicitude of Brother Lucido, who was exceedingly careful, and wished never to stay a month in a place, and if any place pleased him well would leave it, saying, "Not here, but in heaven is our dwelling-place."

How he described unchaste eyes, to teach the friars modesty.

Amongst other virtues he loved and desired to see in the friars, next to the foundation of holy humility, he especially loved the beauty and purity of modesty. When he wished to teach the friars to have chaste eyes, he would describe unchaste eyes in the following parable: A pious and powerful King sent to the Queen two messengers in succession. When the first messenger returned he spoke only of the things connected with his embassy, and said nothing about the Queen. He had wisely kept his eyes

Digitized by Google

to himself, and had not once lifted them to look at the Queen. The other returned and, after a few words, launched out into a long story about the Queen's beauty, "Truly, my Lord, I have seen the most beautiful of women, happy he to whom she belongs!" Then said the King, "Thou wicked servant, who hast dared to lift thine impudent eyes to my spouse. It is clear that, by cunning, thou didst desire to obtain her thou didst gaze upon." He then sent for the first one, and asked him, "What is thy opinion of the Queen?" "The best of opinions, since she so willingly and patiently listened to me," thus answered this wise man. Then said the King, "Thinkest thou she is beautiful?" He replied, "My Lord, her beauty is for your gaze; I had but to repeat the words of your message." Then the King passed this sentence, "Thou, because thine eyes are chaste, shall be in my chamber, chaste of body and a partaker in my delights; but this impudent one must be turned out of the house, that he may not pollute my chamber."

Then he would say, "Who would not fear to gaze upon the Spouse of Christ?"

The three sentences he left to the friars in order to preserve their perfection.

Another time, by reason of the infirmity of his stomach, he vomited blood all night

Digitized by Google

until the morning. His companions seeing that because of his extreme weakness and sufferings he was almost dead, with great grief and torrents of tears said to him, "Father, what will become of us without thee? To whom will you commit us orphans? You have ever been both our father and mother, generating and bearing us in Christ. You have been to us a leader and pastor, a master and corrector, teaching and correcting us more by example than in words. What will become of us, sheep without a shepherd? Orphaned sons without a father? Ignorant and simple men without a guide? Where shall we go to seek you, O glory of poverty, praise of simplicity, honour of our lowliness? Who will show us blind ones the way of truth? Where shall we find the mouth and tongue that spoke to us and advised us? Where the fervent spirit who directed us in the way of the Cross, and encouraged us to Evangelical perfection? Where shall we find you, light of our eyes; where seek you, consoler of our souls? Behold, Father, you are dying! Behold, you abandon us desolate ones, leaving us full of sorrow and bitterness! Behold the dreaded day, the day of weeping and sorrow, the day of desolation and grief approaches. Behold the bitter day which ever since we have been with you we have feared, so that we dared hardly to think of it. Nor is this

Digitized by Google

surprising, since your life has been for us a continual light, and your words as burning torches, firing us to continue in the way of the Cross to Evangelical perfection, to the love and imitation of the sweet Crucified One. And now, Father, bless us and all the other friars, your sons, whom you have begotten in Christ, and leave us some memorial of your will which your friars can ever hold in memory, and say, 'These words were left by our Father to us his friars and sons at his death.'"

Then this most loving Father turned his eyes upon his sons, and said to them, "Call to me Brother Benedict of Pirato." This was a friar, a saintly and discreet priest, who often celebrated for Blessed Francis when he was sick, for he always desired to have or hear Mass howsoever ill he might be. When he came he said to him: "Write down in what manner I give my blessing to all my friars who are in the Order, or who shall come into it in the future, until the end of time; and, seeing that because of my weakness and the pains of my infirmity I cannot speak, in what three sentences I wish shortly to express my will and intention to all the friars in the present and in the future: That in token of my memory and blessing and testament they are ever to love each other as I have loved them; ever to observe and love our Lady Poverty; and evermore to honour and keep faith and loyalty

Digitized by Google

towards the Prelates and Clergy of our holy Mother the Church."

Our Father in the Chapters of the friars was always in the habit at the end of the Chapter of absolving and blessing all the friars at present in the Order and those who would come into it; and, even outside the Chapter, in the fervour of his love, would often do the same. He would also admonish the friars to fear and beware of bad example, and pronounced a malediction upon those who, by bad example, provoked men to blaspheme the Order and the life of the friars, by which the good and holy and poor friars were exposed to shame and great affliction.

Of the love he showed the friars when, before his death, he gave to each one a morsel of bread in imitation of Christ.

One night Blessed Francis was so greatly tormented by the pains of his illness that during the whole night he could neither sleep nor rest. When the morning came, and the pain was somewhat better, he had all the friars called who lived in that place, and as they were seated before him he considered and saw in them the persons of all the friars. And, placing his right hand on the head of each one, he blessed all those present and absent, and all who should enter the Order until the end of time, and he seemed, as it were, to compassionate himself

Digitized by Google

because he could not see all the friars, his sons, before his death.

Desiring, even in death, to imitate his Lord and Master, Whom in his life he had followed so perfectly, he had bread brought to him, and, blessing it, had it broken into small pieces, being too weak to break it himself, and taking the morsels into his hand, gave one to each friar to eat. And whereas the Lord before His death desired, in token of His love, to eat with His apostles on the fifth day of the week, so His perfect imitator, Blessed Francis, desired to give the same token of love to his friars. That he wished in this to follow the example of Christ is shown, because he asked if that was the fifth day of the week. One amongst the friars preserved a portion of his bread; and after the death of Blessed Francis many sick that tasted of it were cured of their maladies.

How he feared the friars should be troubled because of his illness.

When, by reason of his pains, he could not rest, and saw the friars were troubled and fatigued because of this, since he had always loved the souls of the friars more than his own body, he feared they might, out of sheer weariness, offend God by giving way to some impatience. Hence, full of pity and compassion

Digitized by Google

for them, he said: "My best beloved Brothers and little children, do not get wearied of your labours because of my infirmities, since the Lord, for the love of me, His little servant, will restore to you all the fruits of your works, at this time and in the future, which you cannot now do because of my illness—indeed, you shall have a greater reward than you could gain for yourselves, since He who helps me aids all the Order and life of the friars, and you can say of this, 'Whereas we spend ourselves upon you and for you, the Lord will hold Himself our debtor.'"

In speaking thus, the holy Father wished to raise and stimulate the weariness of their spirits out of the exceeding zeal he had for the perfection of their souls. For he feared that because of their labour they might be tempted to murmur, "We cannot both pray and work like this," and by that means fall into melancholy and impatience, thus for slight labour losing a rich reward.

How he admonished the Sisters of St. Clare.

After Blessed Francis had made the *Praises of the Lord in Creatures*, he composed also other holy words, with the music, for the edification and consolation of the Poor Ladies, knowing they were in great tribulation because of his illness.

Digitized by Google

And because he was not able to visit them himself, he sent them these words by his companions. For in these words he desired to show them his will as to the manner of life they were bound to lead in humble converse and united in charity. For he saw that by their conversion and holy conversation they not only exalted the Order of the friars, but also gave great edification to the universal Church. He knew how from the beginning of their conversion they had led lives of great strictness and poverty, and he was moved to pity and compassion for them. Therefore, in those words he besought them, since the Lord had brought them together from various regions, to be one in holy Charity, holy Poverty, and holy Obedience, and in these ever to live and to die. And he particularly admonished them to use the alms sent them by the Lord with cheerfulness and gratitude, to provide discreetly for the health of their body, and that those who were in health should labour to sustain their Sisters who were infirm, and that those who were infirm should bear their sufferings patiently.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

OF HIS CONSTANT FERVENT LOVE AND COMPASSION FOR THE PASSION OF CHRIST.

First, how he took no care for his own infirmities out of love for the Passion of Christ.

So great was the fervour of love and compassion Blessed Francis bore to the sufferings of Christ, and so bitter was his affliction both inwardly and outwardly, on account of Christ's Passion, that he would pay no heed to his own infirmities. And though for a long time, until his death, he suffered from maladies of the stomach, liver and spleen, and since his return from beyond sea with continual and great pain in his eyes, he would take no measures to be cured. Therefore, the Lord Bishop of Ostia, seeing how austerely he had always treated his body, that he was losing his sight, and would do nothing to be cured, admonished him with great pity and compassion, saying to him: "Brother, it is not reasonable to refuse all remedies since your life and health are of the greatest value for your friars, the laity, and all the Church. Since you are ever full of com-

Digitized by Google

passion for your friars who are sick, and are ever kind and charitable towards them, you must not be cruel to yourself in your own needs; hence I command you to seek the means to be cured."

And truly this most blessed Father ever took all bitterness for sweet, since the humility and footsteps of the Son of God contained for him all sweetness.

How he was found lamenting in a loud voice the Passion of Christ.

One time, shortly after his conversion, when he was walking alone in the road, not far from St. Mary of the Portiuncula, he lifted up his voice in lamentation. A certain spiritual man meeting him, and fearing he was suffering from some painful infirmity, said to him: "What ails you, Brother?" to which he answered, "In this way ought I to go through the whole world, without shame lamenting the Passion of my Lord." Then this man began also to lament with many tears. This man we knew, and from him we heard it, for he did much good and mercy to Blessed Francis and us his companions.

How the joy given him by exterior things was turned into tears of compassion for Christ.

At times, when inebriated with the love and compassion of Christ, Blessed Francis, over-

Digitized by Google

flowing with the sweet melody of the spirit within him, would manifest it in the French tongue, and the sound of the Divine whisper in his ears would break forth in a French song of joy. Sometimes he would pick up from the ground a piece of wood, and, holding it on his left arm, would use another piece in the manner of a bow with the gestures of one playing on a violin or other musical instrument, singing to this accompaniment in the language of France of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the end all this joy would be turned into tears and pity for the Passion of Christ. Then would he continue to sigh and make moan, forgetting that which he had in his hands held up to Heaven.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

OF HIS ZEAL FOR PRAYER AND DIVINE SERVICE, AND THE OBSERVANCE OF SPIRITUAL JOY IN HIMSELF AND OTHERS.

First of prayer and the Divine Office.

ALTHOUGH for many years he was afflicted with the before-mentioned infirmities, nevertheless he was always so devout and reverent at prayer and the Divine Office that during the time of reciting the Canonical Hours he would not lean against a wall or other support, but stood always erect, with uncovered head; or upon his knees he watched through the greater part of the night in prayer. Even when travelling abroad, if he were on foot he would stand still while saying the Hours, and if he were riding because of his illness he would get down to recite the Office. At one time when it was raining heavily and he, because of his illness, was on horseback, although he was wet through he got off his horse to say the Hours, with fervent and reverent devotion reciting the Office, standing in the road, as if it were a church or cell, with the rain continuously pouring upon him. Then said he to his com-

Digitized by Google

panion, "If the body, which becomes the prey of worms, desires to take its food in quiet and peace, with what quiet and peace, with what reverence and devotion, should the soul receive its food which is God Himself."

How in himself and in others he ever loved outward and inward spiritual joy.

Blessed Francis, besides prayer and the Divine Office, ever loved to study and promote in himself a spirit of interior and exterior joy. This he also desired to see in his friars, often reproving those who were sad and melancholy.

He used to say that the Servant of God who studied to have peace and exterior and interior spiritual gladness, which arose from purity of heart, and was acquired by devout prayer, him the demons could not harm, saying, "'The Servant of God who in consolation and tribulation alike preserves cheerfulness, into him we cannot find entrance, nor are we able to harm him.' On the other hand, the demons exult when the gladness and devotion that proceed from the purity of prayer and other good works be either extinguished or impeded. For if the devil has anything of his own in the Servant of God, unless he be careful to destroy and get rid of it by the power of holy prayer, contrition, confession, and satisfaction, in a short time from

Digitized by Google

a single hair, by adding to it, he will make it into a beam. Therefore, my Brothers, as from cleanness of heart and purity of continual prayer arises this gladness of spirit, special care should be taken to acquire and preserve these two things, and I desire this gladness both in myself and you for the edification of our neighbour and for the confusion of the enemy. To him and to his it belongs to be sad, but to us ever to be glad and rejoice in the Lord."

How he reproved his companion who showed sadness in his face.

Said Blessed Francis, "Since I know how the demons envy me the benefits given me by the Lord, I know also and see that when they cannot harm me they try to hurt me through my companions. When they see they cannot harm either myself or my companions they withdraw in much confusion. And if at any time I am tempted or inclined to sadness, when I see the joyfulness of my companions, by reason of their cheerfulness the temptation and sadness are turned to interior and exterior gladness."

Hence our Father reproved those who manifested exterior sadness. And once he sharply rebuked one of his companions who went about with a sad face, saying to him, "Why do you outwardly show grief and sadness because of

Digitized by Google

your offences? Keep this between yourself and God, and pray to Him that out of His mercy He may forgive you and restore to your soul that salutary cheerfulness of which you have been deprived as a punishment for your sins. But before me and others strive to be cheerful, for it is not seemly a Servant of God should show a sad and troubled face before his Brethren."

Not that it is to be understood or believed that our Father, who was ever a lover of gravity and decorum, wished this joy to be shown by laughter or the least vain word, since these are not a sign of spiritual joy but of vanity and foolishness; hence in a Servant of God he detested laughter and idle words, and he not only disapproved of his own laughter, but also that he should give the least occasion for laughter in others. In one of his admonitions he clearly explained what should be the gladness of the Servant of God, saying, "Blessed is the Religious who has no joy and gladness except in holy words and works of the Lord, and by this draws men to the love of God in cheerfulness and joy. And woe to those Religious who delight in vain and idle words, and by this provoke men to laughter."

By joyfulness he meant the solicitude, the disposition, and the preparation of the mind to do good with a good will, since by such fervour of disposition others are incited to good even

Digitized by Google

more than by the good itself. Hence he could not bear to see an expression of sadness, as showing melancholy and disinclination of mind and body in doing good. But gravity and seriousness of expression, in all the members of the body and senses, he loved to see both in himself and others, and this he tried to induce them to adopt in word and action. For he knew by his own experience that grave and modest manners were as a wall and strong shield against the darts of the devil, and the soul without this wall and protecting shield is like a naked knight surrounded by strong and well-armed enemies intent and bent upon his death.

How he taught the friars to satisfy the needs of the body, lest prayer be neglected.

The most blessed Father, considering and knowing that the body was created for the service of the soul, and that corporal acts were ordained and allied to spiritual ones, said: "The Servant of God in eating, drinking, sleeping, and other corporal needs, must discreetly satisfy his body, so that Brother Body shall not have cause to murmur and say, 'I cannot stand upright and attend to prayer, nor do any other good works, because you do not satisfy my wants.' But if the Servant of God discreetly and in a good and decent manner satisfies his

Digitized by Google

body, and Brother Body shows a desire to be negligent and slothful and sleepy at prayers, vigils and good works, he must be chastised as a bad and slothful beast of burden that wants to eat, but not to carry its load. But if Brother Body, because of want and poverty, cannot have his needs supplied in health or sickness, when he has humbly and modestly asked his Brother or his Prelate for the love of God, and has not had relief given, let him patiently endure for the love of God Who also endured the same, seeking for comfort and consolation but not finding it. And this need borne patiently will be accounted to him as martyrdom. And he, since he did his best, and asked humbly for the relief of his necessity, is excusable before God even if his body becomes seriously infirm through it."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

OF CERTAIN TEMPTATIONS PERMITTED BY THE LORD TO TRY HIM.

First, how the Devil entered a pillow he had under his head.

WHEN Blessed Francis remained in prayer at the Hermitage at Grecio, in the last cell beyond the large one, one night in the first sleep he called his companion who rested near him; and, rising, the companion came into the passage outside the cell where was Blessed Francis, who said to him: "Brother, I cannot sleep to-night, nor stand upright in prayer, because my legs tremble, and it seems to me as if I had eaten bread made of tares." When his companion spoke to him compassionately, Blessed Francis said: "I verily believe the devil is in this pillow under my head." For although he would never lie on a feather bed nor use a feather pillow, the friars, against his will, had constrained him to use this pillow of feathers because of the ailment in his eyes. He now threw it to his companion, who caught it in his right hand, and put it on his left shoulder, and as he was going along the

Digitized by Google

passage to his cell, he lost his speech, and could neither let go nor move his arm, but remained standing erect and immovable, quite unconscious. When he had remained like this for some time, by the grace of God Blessed Francis called to him, and turning round he at once threw the pillow from him.

Returning to Blessed Francis he told him all that had happened to him, and the blessed Father said: "When I was saying Complin I felt the devil come into the cell, and now do I see how cunning is this devil. Seeing he cannot harm my soul he seeks to deprive my body of its needs, so that I cannot sleep nor stand up in prayer, and by this means he tries to prevent the devotion and gladness of my heart so that I may murmur at my ailments."

Of a serious temptation he had more than two years.

When he was dwelling in the Place of St. Mary he was severely tempted in the spirit for the profit of his soul. And by this was he so greatly afflicted both in body and soul that he would often withdraw from the company of the friars, being unable to show that cheerfulness he was wont to do. Notwithstanding, he mortified himself by abstaining from food and drink and speech, shedding abundant tears, and praying constantly that God might be pleased to deliver

Digitized by Google

him from this affliction. When he had been thus tormented for more than two years, praying one day in the Church of St. Mary he heard in spirit the words of the Gospel: *If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain remove from thence thither, and it shall remove.*

Blessed Francis asked, "Lord, what is this mountain?" and it was said to him: "This mountain is thy temptation." Then said Blessed Francis, "Lord, be it done to me as Thou hast said." At once he was set perfectly free, so that it seemed to him as if he had never had the temptation.

In the same way on the holy Mount Alverna, at the time when he received the Stigmata of the Lord in his body, the temptations and tribulations inflicted on him by the demon caused him so much suffering that he could not be cheerful as was his custom. He said to his companion, "If the friars knew how and what grievous tribulations and sufferings the demons inflict on me they would be moved with pity and compassion towards me."

Of the temptation he had through mice, and how the Lord consoled him and assured him of His kingdom.

Two years before his death, when he was at St. Damian's, in the cell that was made of straw

Digitized by Google

mats, and he suffered so greatly from his eyes that for sixty days he could not bear the light of day nor even that of a fire, the Lord, in order to increase his merits by the increase of his sufferings, permitted a great number of mice to enter his cell, who, day and night, ran over and around him to prevent his praying or resting. And when he was eating they would climb on the table, and infested him in such numbers that both he and his companions saw it to be a diabolical temptation. Blessed Francis finding himself so grievously afflicted was one night moved to pity for himself, and said internally: "Lord, come to my aid in my sufferings that I may bear them patiently." And in spirit it was said to him: "Tell me, Brother, if for these thy sufferings a great and precious treasure were offered thee, one compared to which the whole world is as nothing, wouldst thou not greatly rejoice?" Blessed Francis replied: "Great, Lord, must be that treasure and precious beyond compare, and much to be admired and desired." Then he again heard it said to him: "Therefore, Brother, rejoice and exult in thy infirmities and tribulations, and as for thy rest heed it not, but be as secure as if thou wert already in My kingdom." And rising in the morning he said to his companion: "If the Emperor bestowed on one of his servants a whole kingdom, would not that servant have

Digitized by Google

great cause to rejoice? And if again he gave him his entire Empire would he not rejoice still more?" Then he added: "Therefore it is fitting I should support my ailments and tribulations with much gladness, and taking comfort in the Lord give thanks to God the Father, and His only Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, for all the grace given me by the Lord, since He has deigned to assure me, his unworthy servant, while still living in this world, of His kingdom. Therefore I desire in His praise, and for our consolation and the edification of our neighbour, to compose a new *Praises of the Lord's Creatures*, which we use every day, and without which it would not be possible to live, and by which the human race often greatly offends the Creator. And continually are we ungrateful for so many graces and benefits, not praising the Lord Creator and Giver of all good as we are bound to do." And seating himself he meditated for some time, and after said, "Most High Omnipotent Good Lord," &c., composing a song thereof, and taught his companions to say and sing it.

So great was the sweetness and consolation of his spirit that he called for Brother Pacificus, whom the world entitled the King of Verse and Courteous Doctor of Song, and desired to send him with other friars to go together through the world, preaching and singing the *Praises of*

Digitized by Google

the Lord. And he desired that he amongst them who was the best preacher should first preach to the people, and when the sermon was ended all the others should sing together the *Praises of the Lord*, as the Lord's minstrels; and at the end he desired the preacher should say to the people, "We are the Lord's minstrels, and the reward we ask of you is that you turn to true repentance." And he added: "For what else are the Servants of the Lord but His minstrels to lift up the hearts of men and move them to spiritual gladness?"

And specially would he say that the Friars-Minor were given to the people of God for their salvation.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

OF THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY.

First how he predicted peace between the Bishop of Assisi and the Governor, by virtue of the "Praises of Creatures" he had made, and caused his companions to sing before them.

AFTER Blessed Francis had composed the said *Praises of Creatures*, which he called *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, it happened that great discord arose between the Bishop and the Governor of the city of Assisi, so that the Bishop excommunicated the Governor, and the Governor ordered that no one should sell to the Bishop, nor buy from him, nor make any contract with him. When Blessed Francis, who at the time was sick, heard of this, he was moved with pity for them, especially as no one tried to make peace between them, and said to his companions: "It is a great reproach for the Servants of God that the Bishop and the Governor hate each other, and that no one tries to make peace between them." And then he added another

Digitized by Google

verse to the said *Praises* on this subject as follows:—

"Praise be to Thee, my Lord, by those who pardon
For love of Thee, supporting tribulation.
Blessed be those who keep themselves in peace.
By Thee, the Highest, will they be crownèd."

Then he called one of his companions and said to him: "Go to the Governor and beg him from me that, with the chief men of the city, and such others as will join them, he go to the Bishop's Palace." When this friar had departed, he said to his other two companions: "Go before the Bishop and the Governor and those who are with them, and sing *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, and have confidence in God that He will humble their hearts, and cause them to return to their former love and friendship."

When all were assembled in the cloister of the Bishop's Palace the two friars rose, and one of them said: "Blessed Francis during his illness has made *The Praises of the Lord by all His Creatures*, in honour of the Lord, and for the edification of others; and now he beseeches you to listen to it with great devotion." And they began to recite and sing it.

The Governor also rose and, with joined hands and arms, as if at the Gospel of the Lord, with much devotion and many tears, listened intently, for he had great faith in, and devotion for, Blessed Francis. When the *Praises* were ended,

Digitized by Google

the Governor said before all those present, "Verily I tell you that not only the Lord Bishop, whom I desire and am ever bound to hold as my Lord, but had any one slain my kinsman, or my son, him also I would forgive." With this he fell at the Bishop's feet, saying, "Behold, I am ready to make you any satisfaction that it may please you to demand, for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Servant, Blessed Francis." Then the Bishop taking him by the hand raised him up, saying, "By the virtue of my office it is fitting I should be humble, but as by nature I am prone to anger, I pray you to pardon me." Then with much kindness and love they embraced and kissed each other.

Wholly surprised and glad were the friars to see the prediction of Blessed Francis thus literally fulfilled, and all present looked upon it as a miracle, due to the merits of Blessed Francis, that God had so suddenly visited them and delivered them from all discord and scandal, without recollecting a single word that had brought about this agreement.

We who were with Blessed Francis give testimony that whenever he said, "it will be thus," or "thus," it was fulfilled to the letter, and we have seen and heard so many of these marvellous things that it would take too long either to write or narrate them.

Digitized by Google

How he foresaw the fall of a friar, who would not confess, under the pretext of keeping silence.

There was a certain friar, to all outward seeming of holy and decorous behaviour, who day and night appeared intent only on prayer, and so strictly observed continual silence that when he went to Confession he would sign to the priest instead of speaking his faults. For so great seemed his devotion and fervour in the love of God that, when seated amongst the friars, though he would not speak, he would give signs of gladness in listening to good words, and by this he often attracted other friars to devotion.

When he had persisted for some years in this kind of life Blessed Francis came to the place where he dwelt. When he heard from the friars about this man's behaviour, he said to them: "I verily believe this to be a diabolical temptation that he will not confess." Meanwhile the Minister-General came thither to visit Blessed Francis, and began to praise and commend this friar, whereat Blessed Francis said to him: "Believe me, my Brother, this friar is led and deceived by the evil spirit." The Minister-General replied: "It seems marvellous to me, and almost incredible, that this should be the case with a man who gives so many marks and

Digitized by Google

proofs of sanctity." Then Blessed Francis said: "Try, by saying to this friar, 'I desire you to go to Confession twice, or at least once, a week.'"

To this he again put his finger on his lips and shook his head, to show that he would not do this out of his love for silence. The minister, fearing to scandalise him, let him go. Not many days after, this friar left the Order of his own accord, returning to the world and the secular dress.

It happened one day that two companions of Blessed Francis met him on a certain road, clothed like a poor pilgrim; and, pitying him, they said: "O wretched man, what has become of your decent and holy behaviour? You would not speak and show yourself amongst the friars, and now you wander through the world like a man who knows not God." Then he began to speak and to swear by his faith like the men of the world, and they said to him: "Miserable man, who swear by your faith like a worldling, you who would never speak an idle word, but kept entire silence."

They left him, and soon after he died; and we, who had seen him, marvelled greatly how literally that which Blessed Francis had predicted of him came true, when the unhappy man was considered as a Saint by the friars.

Digitized by Google

Of one who wept before Blessed Francis that he might be received into the Order.

At the time when no one was received into the Order without the permission of Blessed Francis, the son of a certain nobleman, of Lucca, came, with many others, desiring to enter the Order, to Blessed Francis, who was lying sick at the Bishop's Palace in Assisi. When they were all presented to Blessed Francis, this one bowed himself before him, and with tears besought him to receive him. Blessed Francis, reading his soul, said: "O wretched and carnal man, why do you lie to the Holy Ghost and to me? Your tears are carnal, not spiritual!" And as he said this his kinsmen rode up to the palace desiring to capture and take him back. And when the young man heard the trampling of the horses, and saw his kinsmen through a certain window, he went with them back into the world, as Blessed Francis had foreseen.

Of the priest's vineyard that was despoiled of its grapes because of Blessed Francis.

At the Church of St. Fabian, which is near Rieti, Blessed Francis, because of the ailment in his eyes, lodged with a poor priest. At that time the Lord Pope Honorius and his Court

Digitized by Google

were in the same city. Hence many Cardinals and other great ecclesiastics visited Blessed Francis nearly every day, because of the devotion they had for him.

This poor church had a vineyard near the house where Blessed Francis stayed, and here there was a door leading into the vineyard, which was visited by every one that came because of the ripe grapes and the pleasantness of the place, so that the vineyard was deprived of its grapes and almost ruined.

At this the priest began to murmur, saying, "Although the vineyard is but small, nevertheless it sufficed for my needs, and behold, I have lost it all this year." When Blessed Francis heard of this he sent for him and said, "Sir, do not be too greatly troubled since now it cannot be mended, but have confidence in the Lord Who, for the sake of me, His poor little Servant, will restore to you all you have lost. Tell me how many barrels of wine had you when you had the most out of your vineyard?" The priest answered, "Thirteen barrels, Father." Then said Blessed Francis, "Do not grieve any more, nor speak injurious word to any one because of this, but have faith in God and my words, and if you have less than twenty barrels of wine I will make it up to you." Thereupon the priest kept silence and was quiet, and when the time of vintage came, by divine dispensation

Digitized by Google

he had no less than twenty barrels of wine. At this the priest was greatly astonished, and those that heard of it said that even if the vineyard were filled with grapes it was impossible it could yield twenty barrels of wine.

We who were with him bear witness that in this, as in all other matters, that which he predicted was always fulfilled to the letter.

Of the Knights of Perugia who disturbed his preaching.

As Blessed Francis was preaching in the public square of Perugia many people crowded to hear him, when some knights of Perugia raced their horses in the square, and by their armed games disturbed his sermon, and although several of those present rebuked them, they would not desist.

Turning towards them Blessed Francis with fervour of spirit said to them: "Listen and understand that which the Lord announces to you by me, and do not say, We will not hear him because he is an Assisian." He spoke thus because from ancient days there had been hatred and rivalry between the Perugians and Assisians. "God has raised you above your neighbours; therefore are you more bound to confess your Creator by humbling yourselves not only before God, but also before your neighbours. But your hearts are lifted up with pride, and

Digitized by Google

you devastate your neighbours and many you kill; therefore I tell you, that if you do not turn to God, making reparation to those you have harmed, the Lord, Who leaves no sin unpunished, will for your greater punishment and confusion stir up quarrels amongst yourselves, and by sedition and civil strife you shall suffer more than your neighbours could inflict upon you." Thus was Blessed Francis never silent concerning the vices of the people when he preached to them, but always publicly and manfully reproved them. For the Lord had endowed him with so much grace that all who saw and heard him, whatever their station and condition, were filled with fear and reverence for him because of the abundant grace of God in him, so that all he reproved were either edified and converted to the Lord by his words or felt the reproach of conscience.

It came to pass by Divine permission that after some days a serious quarrel broke out between the knights and the populace, and the people ejected the knights from the city. Then the knights, with the church authorities, who supported them, devastated the fields, the vineyards, and the trees, and all the harm they could do to the people they did. The people in like manner destroyed the substance of the knights, and thus, according to the word of St. Francis, were the populace and knights punished.

Digitized by Google

How he detected the hidden temptation of a friar.

A certain very spiritual friar and familiar of Blessed Francis suffered many days from serious diabolic suggestions which plunged him into profound despair. He was daily so greatly persecuted by this that he felt ashamed to confess it so often, and punished himself by excessive abstinence, vigils, tears and disciplines. It happened by Divine permission that Blessed Francis came to the place where he was, and on a certain day, while walking with this friar, Blessed Francis by the Holy Ghost was made aware of his tribulation and temptation, and drawing him aside from another friar who was also with them, said to the troubled man, "Dearest Brother, I tell you that you are not henceforth bound to confess this diabolic suggestion, and do not be afraid, since nothing can hurt your soul, if, according to my advice, you say seven *Our Fathers* as often as you are in trouble." At these words the friar was filled with joy, since he was not bound to confession which had been his greatest affliction. Nevertheless he was wholly astonished when he found Blessed Francis knew that which the priest he confessed to alone knew. And from that time he was delivered from all temptation, and by Divine Grace, and the merits of Blessed Francis, remained in great peace and calm, and, because

Digitized by Google

the Saint had hoped it might be so, he had dispensed him from going to Confession.

That which he predicted of Brother Bernard, and how everything he said came to pass.

When he was near death a certain delicate dish was brought to him. Remembering Brother Bernard, who was the first friar he had, he said to his companions, "This delicacy is good for Brother Bernard." And he had him called to him, who, when he came, sat down on the bed upon which the Saint was lying. Brother Bernard said, "Father, I pray you bless me, and extend to me your love, for if you show me your paternal affection, I believe that God and all the friars will love me the more." Blessed Francis could not see him because for many days he had lost his eyesight, but stretching out his right hand he placed it on the head of Brother Giles, who was the third friar, thinking it to be that of Brother Bernard. And being enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he said, "This is not the head of my Brother Bernard." Then Brother Bernard coming nearer, Blessed Francis placed his hand on his head, saying to one of his companions, "Write that which I tell you. The first friar given me by the Lord was Brother Bernard, who was the first to accept most completely the perfection of the Holy Gospel, giving away all his substance

Digitized by Google

to the poor, for which and many other prerogatives I am bound to love him more than other friars in the whole Order. Therefore, I will and command, as far as I can, that whoever is Minister-General shall love and honour him like unto myself. Let the ministers and all the friars of the whole Order hold to him in my stead."

At this Brother Bernard and the other friars were much consoled. Blessed Francis, considering the great perfection of the same Brother Bernard, prophesied of him in the presence of several friars, saying, "Verily, I tell you certain of the greatest and most cunning demons have been given to Brother Bernard to try him by many tribulations and temptations; but the mercy of the Lord will at the end deliver him from every trouble and temptation, and place his soul in such peace and consolation that all the friars who see this will marvel greatly and hold it to be a miracle; and in this calm, and to the consolation of men, he will pass to the Lord."

These things which the friars heard, not without wonder, from Blessed Francis, were afterwards literally fulfilled in Brother Bernard. For in the very throes of death Brother Bernard had such peace and consolation of spirit that he would not lie down, but rested partly sitting up, nor did the slightest mist obscure his mind to hinder his meditation on God either in sleep or

Digitized by Google

in imagination. And if at any time he felt anything of the kind, he would rise and, striking himself, would say, "What is this? Why did I think thus?" And if they offered him medicine, he would not accept it, but said, "Do not disturb me." In order to be still more free and at peace in dying, he placed the care of his body in the hands of a certain friar who was a physician, saying to him, "I do not desire to have any care for eating or drinking, so I commit it to you; if you give me anything I will take it; if not, I shall not ask." From the time when he began to be infirm he would always have a priest near him until the hour of his death, and if anything that came into his mind disturbed him he would at once go to Confession.

After death he became white and his flesh soft, and to those who saw him he seemed to smile. More beautiful was he in death than he had been in life, looking indeed like a smiling Saint.

How before his death he sent word to Blessed Clare that she should see him, and how it came to pass after his death.

In the week that Blessed Francis departed, the Lady Clare, first seedling of the Poor Sisters of St. Damians of Assisi, and strenuous follower of St. Francis in the observance of Gospel perfection, fearing to die before him, for at that

Digitized by Google

time they were both seriously ill, grieved bitterly and could not be consoled, fearing she should not see her only Father after God, her consoler and teacher, who had first founded her in the grace of God, before her death. She sent word of her fear to Blessed Francis by a certain friar, which when the Saint heard, he was filled with great pity for her, for he loved her with paternal affection beyond all others. But considering that which she most desired, namely to see him, was impossible, for the consolation of herself and all the Sisters he sent by letter his blessing, and absolved them from all defects against his admonitions and against the commands and counsels of the Son of God. And to remove her grief and sorrow he said to the friar whom he sent: "Go and tell Sister Clare not to grieve and be sad because at present she cannot see me, but let her know she shall verily see me before her death, and both she and her sisters on seeing me shall be greatly consoled."

A short time after, when, during the night, Blessed Francis passed away, at the dawn there came all the people and clergy of the City of Assisi, and carried the blessed body to the place where it was laid, with hymns and canticles, bearing green branches; by the will of the Lord it stopped at St. Damians, that the words might be fulfilled which the Lord had spoken through Blessed Francis for the consolation of

Digitized by Google

His daughters and handmaidens. And removing the grating through which they received Communion and heard the Word of God, the friars lifted the holy body from the bier and held it in their arms before the window for a long time, giving the Lady Clare and her sisters this consolation, though they were full of sorrow and affliction, shedding many tears, at being deprived of the consolations and admonitions of such a Father.

How he predicted that his body would be honoured after his death.

One day as he was lying sick at the Bishop's house in Assisi, a certain spiritual friar said to him by way of a jest, and half-laughing: "At what price will you sell to the Lord all your sackcloth? Many canopies and much silken cloth will be placed over your little body which is now wrapped in sacking." For he had his habit patched with sackcloth, and had a coverlet of the same. Blessed Francis answered, or rather the Holy Ghost through him, saying with great fervour of spirit and gladness: "You say true, for this will happen for the praise and glory of my God."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI

OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE THAT SUCCOURED HIM IN EXTERIOR THINGS.

First, how the Lord provided for the friars who entertained the surgeon at their poor table.

WHEN Blessed Francis was at the Hermitage of San Colombano, near Rieti, for the ailment in his eyes, he was one day visited by the eye doctor, who was with him some time, and was about to leave when Blessed Francis said, "Give the doctor to eat of the best," to which the companion replied: "Father, with shame I say it, but we are at present so poor we are ashamed to ask him to dine." Then Blessed Francis said to his companion, "Ye of little faith, do not compel me to speak again." The surgeon said to Blessed Francis: "Brother, since the friars are so poor, it pleases me all the better to eat with them." For this surgeon was very rich, and although Blessed Francis and his companions had often invited him he had always refused to eat with them. The friars spread the table, and with shame placed before the surgeon a little bread, some wine, and a few olives which was all they

Digitized by Google

had for themselves. When they were seated at this poor meal there came a loud knocking at the door of the place, and one of the friars rose to open it, and saw there a woman carrying a large vessel full of beautiful white bread, fishes, and pasties of crawfish, with honey and grapes, sent to Blessed Francis by a certain lady of a castle some seven miles distant.

Seeing these things the surgeon and friars were wholly surprised and consoled, ascribing it all to the holiness of Blessed Francis and his merits; and the surgeon said to the friars: "My Brothers, neither you nor I know all the sanctity of this man."

Of the fish he longed for when he was ill.

Another time when he was seriously ill at the Palace of the Bishop in Assisi, the friars begged him to eat something. He answered, "I have no desire to eat, but if I could have some of the fish called skate, I think I could eat of it."

Hardly had he spoken when a person arrived carrying on a tray three skate, well prepared, surrounded by crawfish, of which the blessed Father gladly partook. This had been sent by Brother Gerard, the minister of Rieti, and the friars seeing this wonder of Divine Providence gave thanks to the Lord in providing for His Servant, since it would have been impossible to procure these things at Assisi, it being winter-time.

Digitized by Google

Of the food and cloth he desired before his death.

When he was sick at St. Mary of the Angels with his last illness—the one of which he died—he one day called his companions and said to them: "You know how the Lady Jacoba dei Sette-Soli is faithful and devoted to me and our Order, therefore I believe she would consider it a great grace and consolation if she were told of my condition, particularly if she were asked to send me some religious cloth, ash coloured, and with the cloth some cakes she often made for me in the city." These cakes, called by the Romans *mostaccioli*, are made of almonds, sugar, and other things.

For this lady was very spiritual, a widow, and one of the richest and noblest in Rome, who, by means of the preaching of Blessed Francis, had received such great grace from the Lord, that by her tears and devotion for the love and charity of Christ she seemed to be another Magdalen. They, therefore, wrote a letter as the Saint desired, when, a certain friar going to seek for another friar to take it to this lady, a loud knocking resounded on the door of the place, which a friar opening beheld there the Lady Jacoba, who in great haste had come to visit Blessed Francis.

When this friar recognised her he ran to Blessed Francis, and joyfully told him how the

Digitized by Google

Lady Jacoba had come with her son and many others to visit Blessed Francis, asking: "What is to be done, Father? Will you allow her to enter and come to you?" This he said, since it was the will of Blessed Francis that, because of the holy devotion and decorum in that place, no woman should enter the enclosure. Blessed Francis said, "This rule is not to be observed with regard to this lady, whose faith and devotion have brought her here from such distant parts." Then the lady came in to Blessed Francis, shedding many tears before him. And wonderful to relate! she brought with her the death shroud of ash-coloured cloth for a habit, and all that had been mentioned in the letter, just as if she had received the said letter.

The lady said to the friars, "My Brothers, it was told me in spirit as I was praying, 'Go and visit your Father, Blessed Francis; hasten and do not delay, for if you delay long you will not find him alive, and take with you cloth for a habit and other things, and prepare such and such food; also take a good quantity of wax for lights and the same of incense.'" All these things were mentioned in the letter except incense. Thus did He who inspired the kings to come with offerings to honour His Son on the day of His Nativity, inspire this noble and holy lady to come with offerings to honour His beloved

Digitized by Google

servant on the day of his death, which was for him his true nativity.

The lady gave him the cakes she had prepared for him which the blessed Father had fancied, but he could taste only very little of them, for he was failing fast and very near death. But he had many candles made that were burned before his holy body after death, and the cloth the friars made into a habit for his burial. On this he ordered them to sew a piece of sackcloth in token of humility and the Lady Poverty, and in the week of the Lady Jacoba's arrival our most holy Father departed to the Lord.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII

OF HIS LOVE FOR CREATURES, AND THE LOVE OF CREATURES FOR HIM.

First, of the special love he had for birds called hooded larks, by reason of their likeness to good Religious.

TOTALLY absorbed in the love of God, Blessed Francis regarded the perfect goodness of the Lord not only in his own soul, which was adorned with the perfection of virtue, but also in all creatures, especially those in which he saw some figure of the things appertaining to God or to religion. Amongst all birds he loved most certain little birds in the vulgar tongue called hooded larks, and he would say of them: "Sister Lark has a hood like a Religious, and is a humble bird who goes by the way seeking a few grains, and when she has found them, even amongst the dirt, she picks them up and eats them. Flying upwards she praises God like a good Religious who despises earthly things, whose conversation is always in heaven, and whose sole desire is to give praise to the Lord. Her garments, that is her feathers, are in hue

Digitized by Google

like the earth, and give example to Religious not to possess delicate and gaily-coloured garments, but such as are lowly in cost and colour, even as the earth is lowlier than the other elements."

And because he admired these things in them he was always glad to see them. Hence it pleased the Lord that these holy little birds should show him some sign of affection at the hour of his death. For on the evening of Saturday, after Vespers, before the night in which he departed to the Lord, a great number of these birds, called larks, came above the roof of the place where he lay, and flew wheeling round it, singing softly and praising the Lord.

How he wished to persuade the Emperor to make a special law that at the Feast of the Lord's Nativity men should provide well for the birds, oxen, and asses, and for the poor.

We who were with Blessed Francis and write these things, testify that many times we heard him say: "If I could speak with the Emperor, I would supplicate and persuade him that, for the love of God and me, he would make a special law that no man should snare or kill our sisters the larks, nor do them any harm. Also, that all chief magistrates of cities and lords of castles and villages should, every year, on the day of

Digitized by Google

the Lord's Nativity, compel men to scatter wheat and other grain on the roads outside cities and castles, that our Sister Larks and all other birds may have to eat on that most solemn day; and that, out of reverence for the Son of God, Who on that night was laid by the most Blessed Virgin Mary in a manger between an ox and an ass, all who have oxen and asses should be obliged on that night to provide them with abundant and good fodder; and also that on that day the poor should be most bountifully fed by the rich."

For Blessed Francis held in higher reverence than any other the Feast of the Lord's Nativity, saying, "After the Lord was born, our salvation became a necessity." Therefore he desired that on this day all Christians should exult in the Lord, and for the love of Him Who gave Himself for us should generously provide not only for the poor, but also for the beasts and birds.

Of the love and obedience shown him by the fire when he had to be cauterised.

When he came to the Hermitage of San Colombano, near Rieti, for the cure of his eyes, to which he was constrained by obedience to the Lord Bishop of Ostia and Brother Elias, Minister-General, one day came to him the surgeon, who, after considering the ailment, said to

Digitized by Google

Blessed Francis that he wished to make a cautery across the cheek to the brow of the eye most affected. But Blessed Francis would not have the cure begun before the coming of Brother Elias, because he had expressed the wish to be present when the surgeon undertook the operation, for as Blessed Francis feared, and had serious scruples about showing so much care for his body, he desired the Minister-General should take charge of all.

When, however, he did not come as expected, many things hindering him, he gave permission to the surgeon to do as he wanted. When the iron was put in the fire to heat it for the cautery, Blessed Francis, to comfort his spirit so that he might not be afraid, spoke thus to the fire: "My Brother Fire, noble and beautiful amongst other creatures, be courteous to me in this hour, because of the affection I have borne and bear thee for the love of Him Who created thee. I pray also that our Creator Who made us both may temper thy heat that I may be able to bear it."

We who were there fled out of pity and compassion, so that he remained alone with the surgeon. When the cautery was made we returned to him, who said: "O faint-hearted and of little faith, why did you flee? Truly, I tell you, I felt no pain nor the heat of the fire, and if the flesh be not well burnt, then burn it better."

Digitized by Google

Great was the wonder of the surgeon, who said, "My Brothers, I tell you that not only in him, who is so feeble and infirm, but even in the strongest man, I should fear he could not bear such a severe cautery, but he neither moved nor gave any sign of pain." It had been needful to sear all the veins from the ear to the eyebrow, yet it profited nothing. Also another surgeon pierced both his ears with a hot iron, equally in vain.

Nor is it surprising that the fire and other creatures obeyed and reverenced him, for we who were with him have seen how he loved and delighted in them, and so full of pity and compassion for them was he that he would not see them unfairly treated, and would talk to them with inward and outward gladness as if they were endowed with reason, seeming often on these occasions rapt up to God.

How he would not let them put out the fire that burned his small clothes.

Amongst all the inferior and unreasoning creatures, he had a singular affection for fire because of its beauty and utility, and desired never to hinder it in its office. Sitting one day near the hearth the fire caught his small clothes, which were of linen, and had reached his knee without his perceiving it. His companion seeing

Digitized by Google

him burning, and trying to put it out, he forbade him, saying, "Have a care, dearest Brother, you do no harm to the fire." He, however, hastened to the friar who was his guardian, and brought him to Blessed Francis, and at once put out the fire against his wish. However urgent the need, he would never extinguish fire, lamp, or candle, so great was the compassion that moved him in this. Nor would he allow a friar to throw away a light, nor to remove a smouldering log from place to place as is the custom, but to put it on the ground out of reverence towards Him Who created it.

How he would never use a certain fur because he had not allowed it to be burned.

Once, when he was keeping Lent on Mount Alverna, his companion at the meal hour one day prepared a fire in the cell where they ate, and having lighted it went to the other cell where Blessed Francis prayed, taking with him the missal to read the Gospel of the day to him, for he would always have the Gospel of the Mass for the day read to him before eating when he could not hear Mass.

When they came to the cell for the meal where the fire was kindled, behold the flame had mounted to the roof and was burning it, whereupon his companion tried to put out the fire, but could not do so by himself. But Blessed

Digitized by Google

Francis would not help him, and taking the fur that covered him at night went out into the wood.

The friars of the place in the neighbourhood of the cell seeing it burning came at once and extinguished the fire. After a while Blessed Francis returned to his meal, and after eating said to his companion, "Never more will I let this fur cover me, since, prompted by avarice, I would not let Brother Fire consume it."

Of the singular love he had for water and stones, wood and flowers.

Next to fire he most loved water, which is the symbol of holy penance and tribulation whereby the stains are washed from the soul, and by which the first cleansing of the soul takes place in holy Baptism. Hence when he washed his hands he would select a place where he could not tread the water underfoot. When he walked over stones he would tread on them with fear and reverence for the love of Him Who is called the Rock, and when reciting the words of the Psalm, *Thou hast exalted me on a rock*, would add with great reverence and devotion, "beneath the foot of the rock hast thou exalted me."

In the same way he would tell the friars who

Digitized by Google

cut and prepared the wood not to cut down the whole tree, but only such branches as would leave the tree standing, for love of Him Who died for us on the wood of the Cross. So, also, he would tell the friar who was the gardener not to cultivate all the ground for vegetables and herbs for food, but to set aside some part to produce green plants which should in their time bear flowers for the friars, for love of Him Who was called "The Flower of the Field," and "The Lily of the Valley." Indeed he would say the Brother Gardener should always make a beautiful little garden in some part of the land, and plant it with sweet-scented herbs bearing lovely flowers, which in the time of their blossoming invited men to praise Him Who made all herbs and flowers. For every creature cries aloud: "God has made me for thee, O man!"

Thus we who were with him saw how outwardly and inwardly he rejoiced in every creature he could touch or see, wherein his spirit seemed not to be on earth but in heaven. And because of the many consolations given him by creatures, he composed the before-mentioned *Praises of God in His Creatures* before his death, to incite the hearts of the hearers to praise God, and that all men might praise the Lord in His creatures.

Digitized by Google

How he praised the Sun and Fire above all Creatures.

Above all unreasoning creatures he loved with the most affection the Sun and Fire, saying of them: "In the morning when the sun rises every man is bound to praise God Who created him for our use, for by him are our eyes enlightened during the day; in the same way when the night comes every man should praise Brother Fire who enlightens our eyes at night, and without whom we should be, as it were, blind; and as the Lord by these two Brothers gives sight to our eyes, so for these and all other creatures made for our use we are bound daily to praise the Creator." And this he did always until the day of his death.

When he was much tried by great infirmity he would begin to chant the *Praises of the Lord in His Creatures*, and then made his companions sing it, that in thinking of the praises of the Lord he might forget the bitterness of his sufferings and infirmities. And because he held and said the Sun to be the most beautiful of all creatures, and most like the Lord Who in the Scriptures is called "The Sun of Justice," he called these *Praises of the Lord in His Creatures*, which he made at the time the Lord had assured him of His Kingdom, *The Canticle of Brother Sun.*

Digitized by Google

This is the "Praise of Creatures" which he made when the Lord assured him of His Kingdom.

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord,
To Thee be praise, glory, honour and benediction,
To thee alone, most Highest, are they due ;
There is no man who worthily may name Thee.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, in all Thy creatures,
Especially for Master Sun, our Brother,
By whom the day is constantly enlightened,
Radiant and bright, and with great splendour shining,
And thus, Most High, a symbol is of Thee.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for Sister Moon and Stars,
Which Thou hast formed in Heaven fair, clear and precious.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for Brother Wind,
For air and clouds, for times serene and stormy,
Whereby Thou dost provide for all Thy creatures.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for Sister Water,
Useful and humble, ever chaste and precious.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for Brother Fire,
By whom Thou dost illuminate the night,
Noble and beautiful, jocund, robust and strong.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for Sister Earth, our Mother,
By whom we are sustained and fed and governed ;
Who brings forth fruits, with herbs and bright-hued flowers.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for those who pardon
For love of Thee, supporting tribulations.
Blessed be those who keep themselves in peace,
By Thee, Most High, will they at length be crowned.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for Sister Death of body,
From whom no living man can make escape ;
But woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are they who do Thy Holy Will,
To them the second death can bring no evil.
Praise ye and bless my Lord, and thank Him,
And serve Him ever with great Humility.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII

OF HIS DEATH, AND THE JOY HE SHOWED WHEN HE KNEW FOR CERTAIN HIS DEATH WAS NEAR.

First, of the answer he gave Brother Elias when he reproved him for the joy he showed.

WHEN he was lying very sick in the Palace of the Bishop of Assisi, and the hand of the Lord seemed to press more and more heavily upon him, the people of Assisi, fearing if he died in the night the friars might take away the holy body and carry it to some other city, made provision that every night diligent men should keep watch round the walls of the palace. Meanwhile the most blessed Father to console his spirit, lest by reason of the excessive pain he should faint, frequently during the day made his companions sing to him *The Praises of the Lord*, and also at night, to the edification and consolation of the men carefully keeping guard outside the palace walls. But Brother Elias, wondering that Blessed Francis in such agony could thus comfort himself and rejoice in the Lord, said to him: "Beloved Father, the joy shown by you and your companions in your

Digitized by Google

illness, gives me much edification and consolation, but as the people of this city venerate you as a Saint, and firmly believe you, because of your incurable malady, to be near death, hearing these *Praises* sung day and night may say to themselves, 'Why does he show this joy who is so close to dying—should he not rather be thinking of death?'" Blessed Francis said to him: "Do you remember when, near Foligno, you had a vision, and told me it had been revealed to you that I should live but two years longer? Before you had that vision you know that by the grace of God, Who suggests all good to the heart and places it in the mouth of His faithful, day and night I thought upon my end. But from the hour you had the vision I was still more solicitous to consider daily the hour of my death." And he added with much fervour of spirit: "Permit me, Brother, to rejoice in the Lord and in His praise and my own infirmities, since by the co-operating grace of the Holy Ghost I am so united and joined to my Lord that by His mercy I well may greatly rejoice in Him."

How he induced the physician to tell him how long he had to live.

At that time there came to visit him in the palace a certain physician of Arezzo, called

Digitized by Google

Good John, he being very intimate with Blessed Francis, who questioned him, saying, "What think you, kind friend, of this my malady of dropsy?" He would not call him by his proper name, for that he would call none good out of reverence for the Lord, Who said, *Call no man good but God.* Nor would he call any one father or master, nor write thus in his letters out of reverence for the Lord, Who said, *For one is your Master and all you are brethren; and call none your father upon earth, for one is your Father Who is in heaven.* And the physician replied, "Brother, it shall be well with you, by the grace of God." Again St. Francis said, "Tell me the truth. How does it seem to you? Do not fear, because by the grace of my God I am not faint-hearted nor afraid of death, since by the power of the Holy Ghost I am so united to my Lord that life or death equally contents me." Then the physician said to him, "Manifestly, Father, according to our medical science your malady is incurable, and, I believe, you will die either at the end of September or the beginning of October."

At this Blessed Francis sat up in his bed, and with much devotion and reverence spread out his hands to the Lord, saying with great mental and corporal gladness, "Welcome, my Sister Death!"

Digitized by Google

How, when he heard he was soon to die, he had the "Praises" sung to him which he had made.

After this a certain friar said to him, "Father, your life and conversation have been the light and mirror, not only of your friars, but also of the whole Church, and so will be your death; and though your death will cause your friars and many others much sadness and grief, yet to you it will bring consolation and infinite joy to pass from great labour to great rest, from many sufferings and temptations to eternal peace, from the temporal poverty you have loved and observed perfectly to true and ever-enduring riches, from temporal death to perpetual life, where you will see the Lord your God face to face Whom in this world you have desired with such ardent love." Having said this, he added plainly, "Father, know this for truth, that unless the Lord sends you a remedy from heaven your malady is past curing, and you have but a short time to live, as the physician has told you. This I tell you to comfort your spirit that internally and externally you may rejoice in the Lord, so that your friars and all others who visit you may find you ever with joy in the Lord, and these seeing and others hearing this, it may remain a perpetual memory of your death, as of your life and conversation it ever has been."

Then Blessed Francis, although suffering even

Digitized by Google

more than usual, was renewed in gladness of mind on hearing that Sister Death was so near him, and with great fervour of spirit praised the Lord, saying, "Since it pleases my Lord that I am so soon to die, call to me Brother Angelo and Brother Leo that they may sing to me of Sister Death."

When these two friars came to him full of grief and sorrow, with many tears they sang the *Canticle of Brother Sun and the other Creatures of the Lord* which the Saint had made. And before the last verse of this Canticle he added that other verse on Sister Death, saying :—

" Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for Sister Death of body,
From whom no living man can make escape ;
But woe to those that die in mortal sin !
Blessed are they who do Thy holy Will,
To them the second death can bring no evil."

How he blessed the city of Assisi when he was carried to St. Mary's, where he died.

When the most blessed Father knew by the Holy Ghost, as well as the sentence of the physician, that his death was near, he was still in the said palace, and feeling himself growing worse and more feeble in body he enjoined them to carry him in a litter to St. Mary of the Portiuncula, that he might give up his bodily life where he had first found the life and light of his soul.

Digitized by Google

When those that carried him came to the hospital, which is half-way on the road from Assisi to St. Mary's, he told them to place the litter on the ground, and as, by reason of the long and serious malady in his eyes, he could scarcely see, he made them turn the litter with his face towards the city of Assisi.

And raising himself up he blessed the said city, saying, "Lord, since in ancient times I believe this city was the dwelling of wicked men, so now I see that, because of Thy abundant mercy, in the time that may please Thee in Thy great mercy Thou wilt show therein, solely because of Thy goodness, that Thou hast chosen it to be the place and habitation of those who truly know Thee and will give glory to Thy holy Name; and the odour of their good fame, holy lives, true doctrine, and observance of evangelical perfection will be spread amongst all Christian people. I beseech Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, Father of Mercy, not to regard our ingratitude, but to remember always the abundant pity Thou hast shown this city, that she may ever be the place and habitation of those who know Thee in truth and glorify Thy blessed and glorious Name for ever and ever. Amen."

And when he had said this he was carried to St. Mary's, where, having completed forty years of his life and twenty years of perfect penance, in the year of our Lord 1227, on the 4th of the

Digitized by Google

Nones of October, he passed away to our Lord Jesus Christ, Whom he loved with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, with ardent desire and fullest affection, following Him most perfectly, swiftly running after Him, and ultimately gloriously coming to Him Who, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth for ever and ever. Amen.

HERE ENDS THE MIRROR OF PERFECTION OF THE FRIAR-MINOR, BLESSED FRANCIS, IN WHICH AS IN A MIRROR CAN BE SEEN THE PERFECTION OF HIS VOCATION AND PROFESSION. ALL PRAISE, ALL GLORY TO GOD THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY GHOST. HONOUR AND THANKSGIVING TO THE MOST GLORIOUS VIRGIN MARY AND HER HOLY MARTYR KUNERA; MAGNIFICENCE AND EXALTATION TO HER SERVANT FRANCIS. AMEN.

DONE IN THE SACROSANCT PLACE OF ST. MARY OF THE PORTIUNCULA, AND COMPLETED ON THE FIFTH OF THE IDES OF MAY IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1228.

THE END

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
Edinburgh & London

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

FEB 28 1985
JAN 31 1986
JUN 1 1989
DEC 7 1972
OCT 30 1973
MAR 31 1979
APR 30 1979

Digitized by Google